

[54] **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CASTING ARTICLES**

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[58] **Field of Search** 164/23, 24, 34-36, 164/122, 122.1, 122.2, 125, 127, 129, 133, 136, 137, 338.1, 339, 350, 352, 353, 361, 516, 517, DIG. 15; 249/111; 264/221

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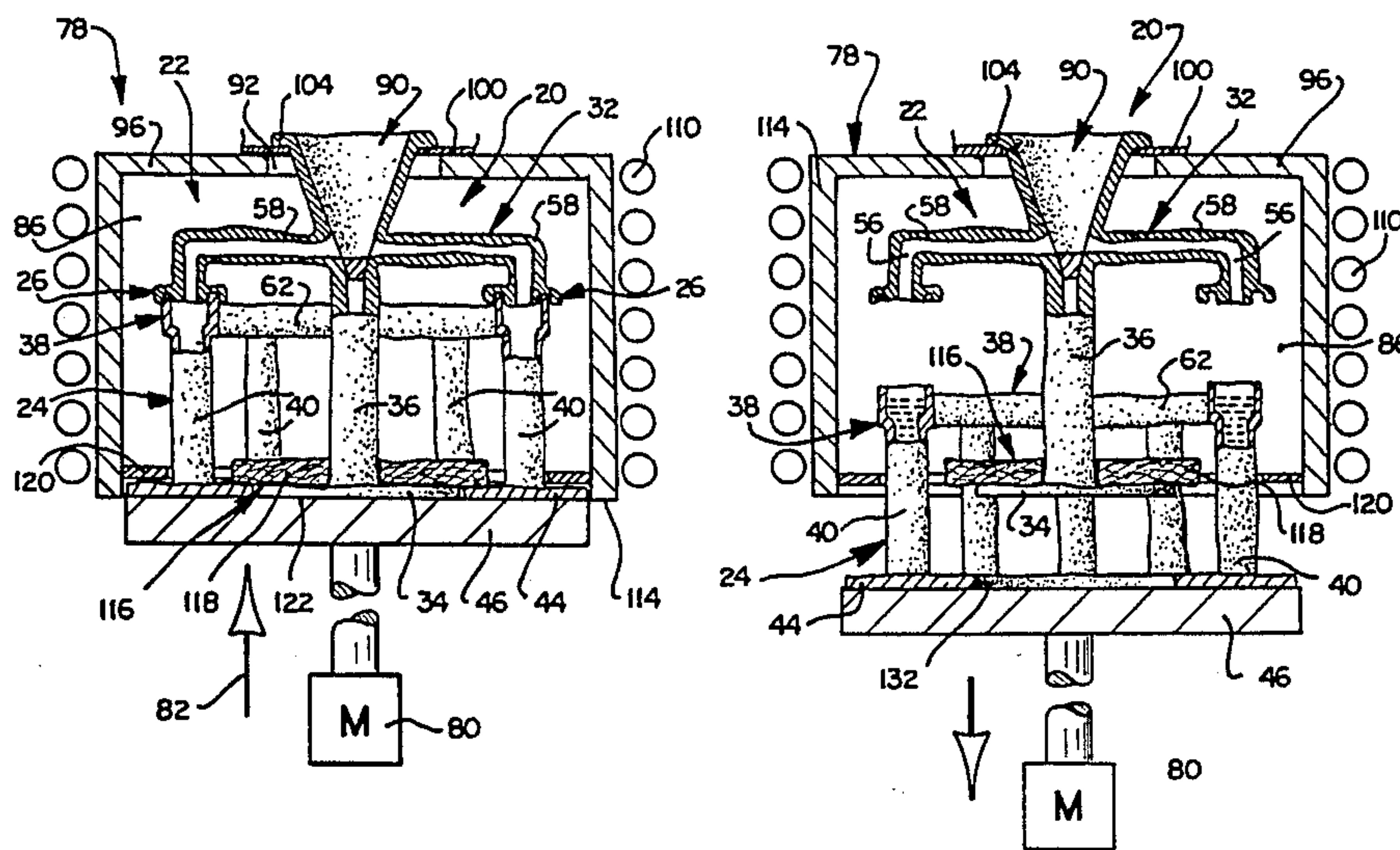
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[57] **ABSTRACT**

An improved mold includes an upper mold section having a primary distribution system which is connected with a furnace and a lower mold section which is withdrawn from the furnace on a chill plate. A baffle plate is supported from the primary distribution system. The lower mold section includes a secondary distribution system which is connected in fluid communication with the primary distribution system at separable joints. The secondary distribution system is connected in fluid communication with article molds which are disposed in an annular array. During pouring of molten metal, reaction forces are transmitted to the chill plate from the pour cup through a support post and baffle plate. Once the article molds have been filled with molten metal, the chill plate is lowered. The primary distribution system which is connected to the furnace, remains stationary. As the article molds are withdrawn from the furnace, the baffle blocks the transfer of heat from the furnace through the central portion of the array of article molds.

59 Claims, 13 Drawing Figures



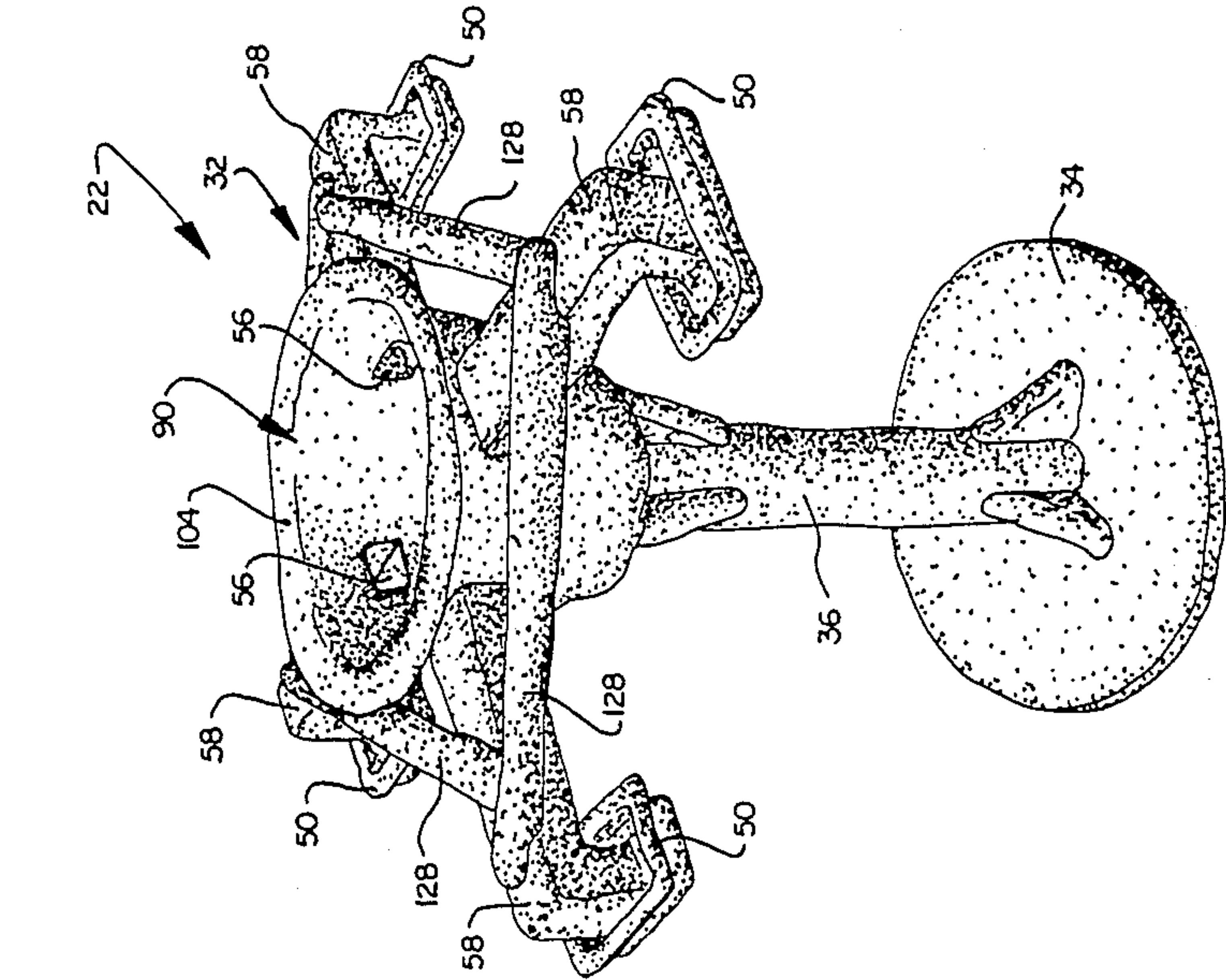


FIG. 2

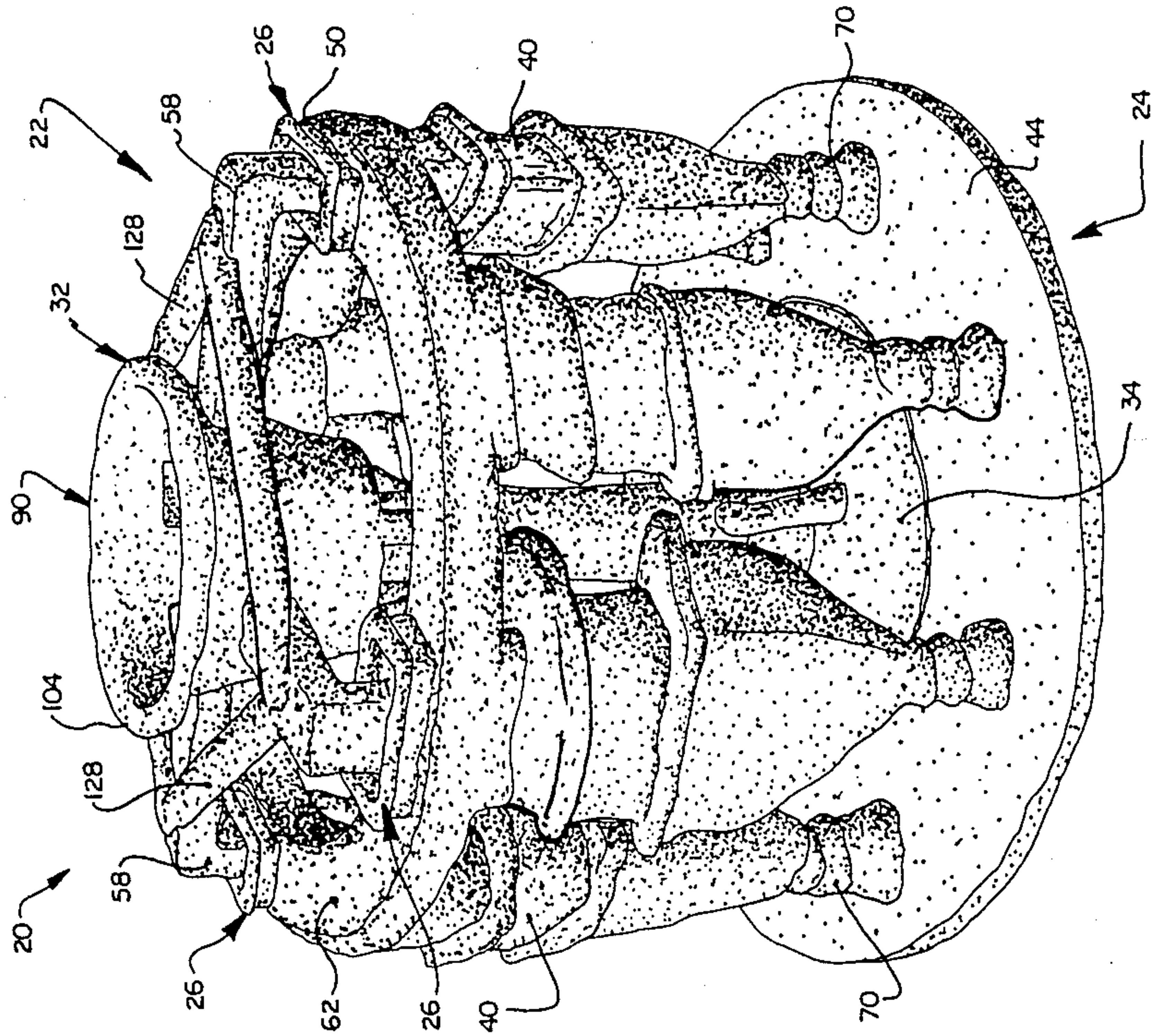


FIG. 1

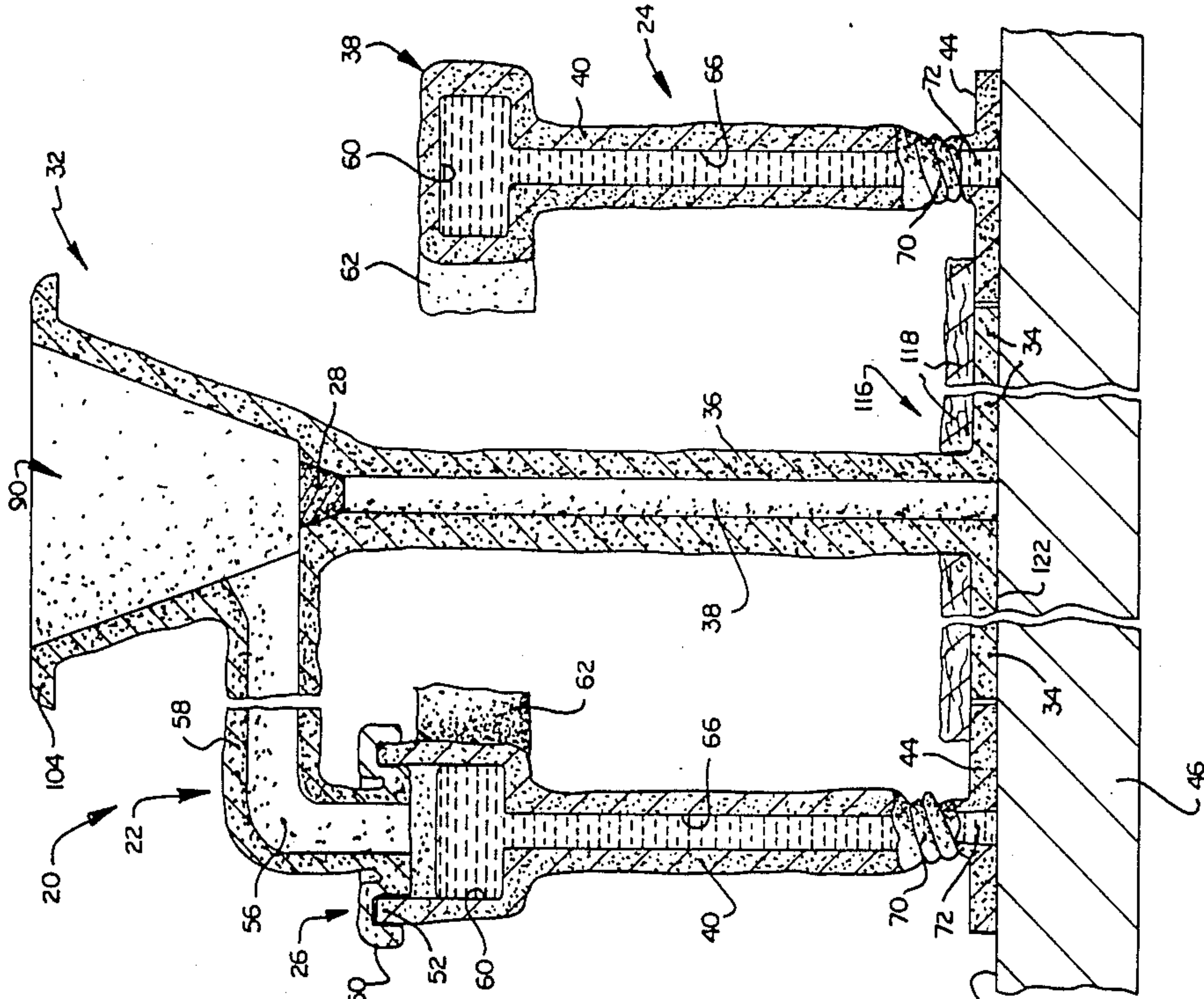


FIG. 4

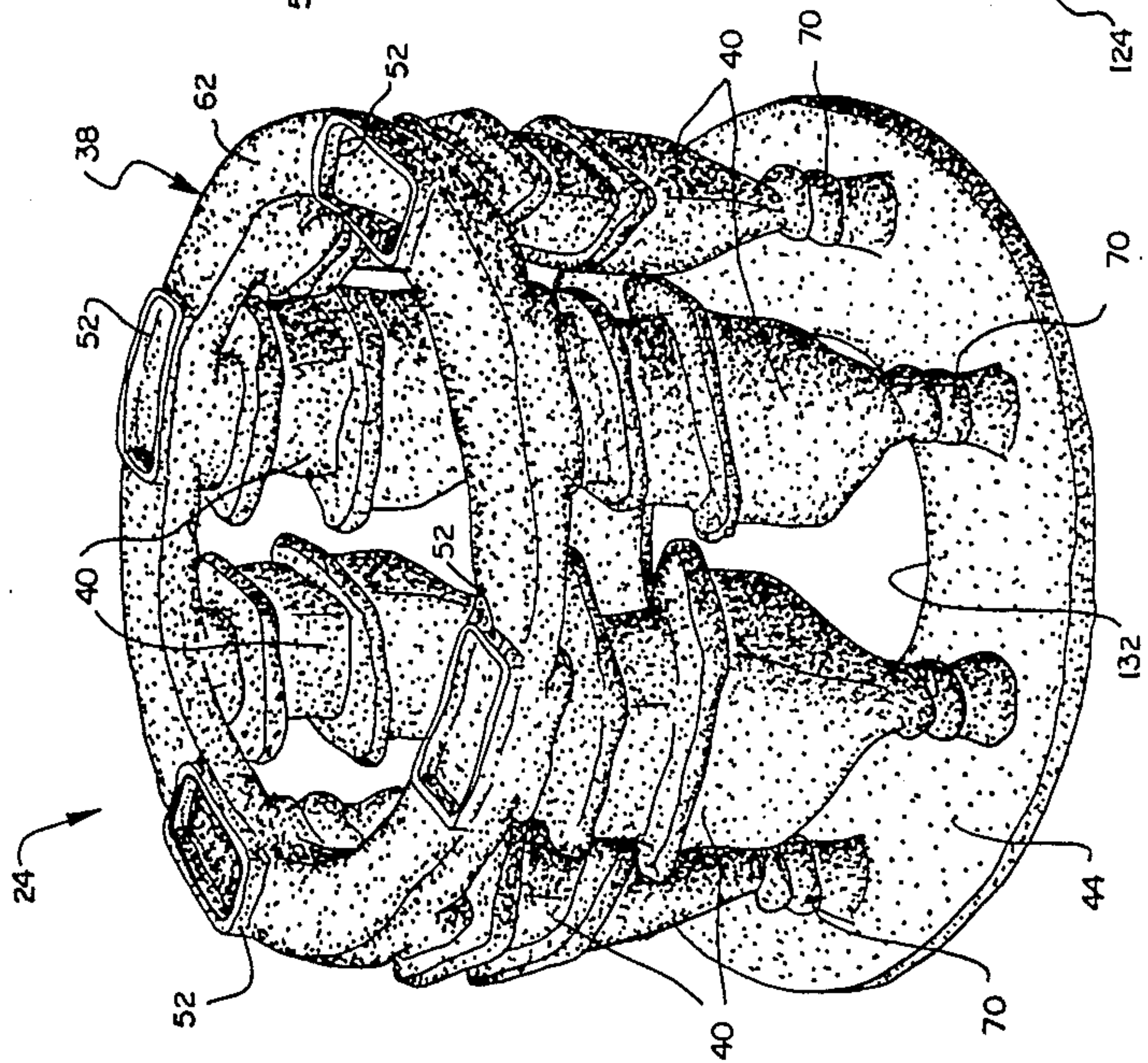


FIG. 3

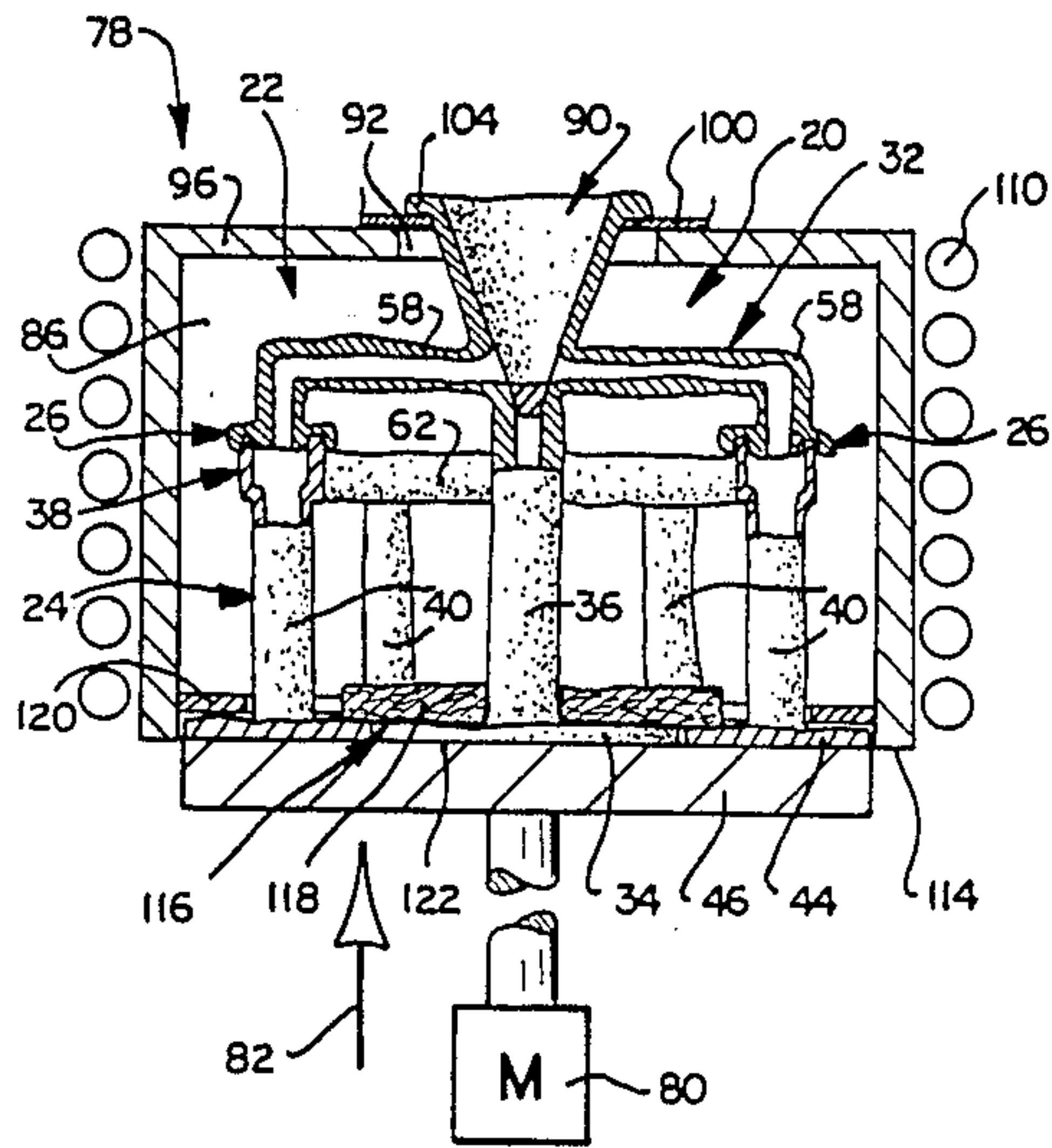


FIG. 5

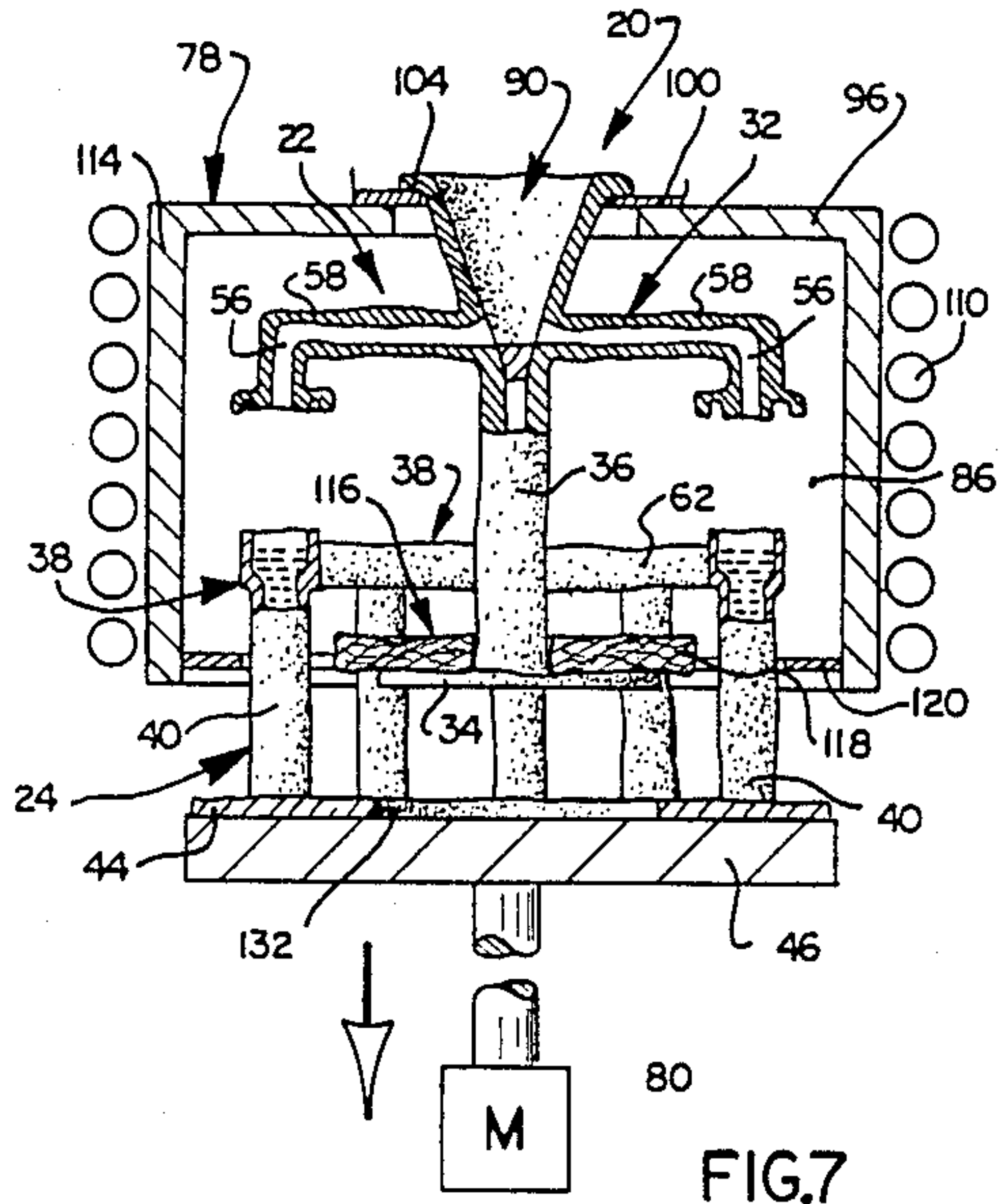


FIG. 7

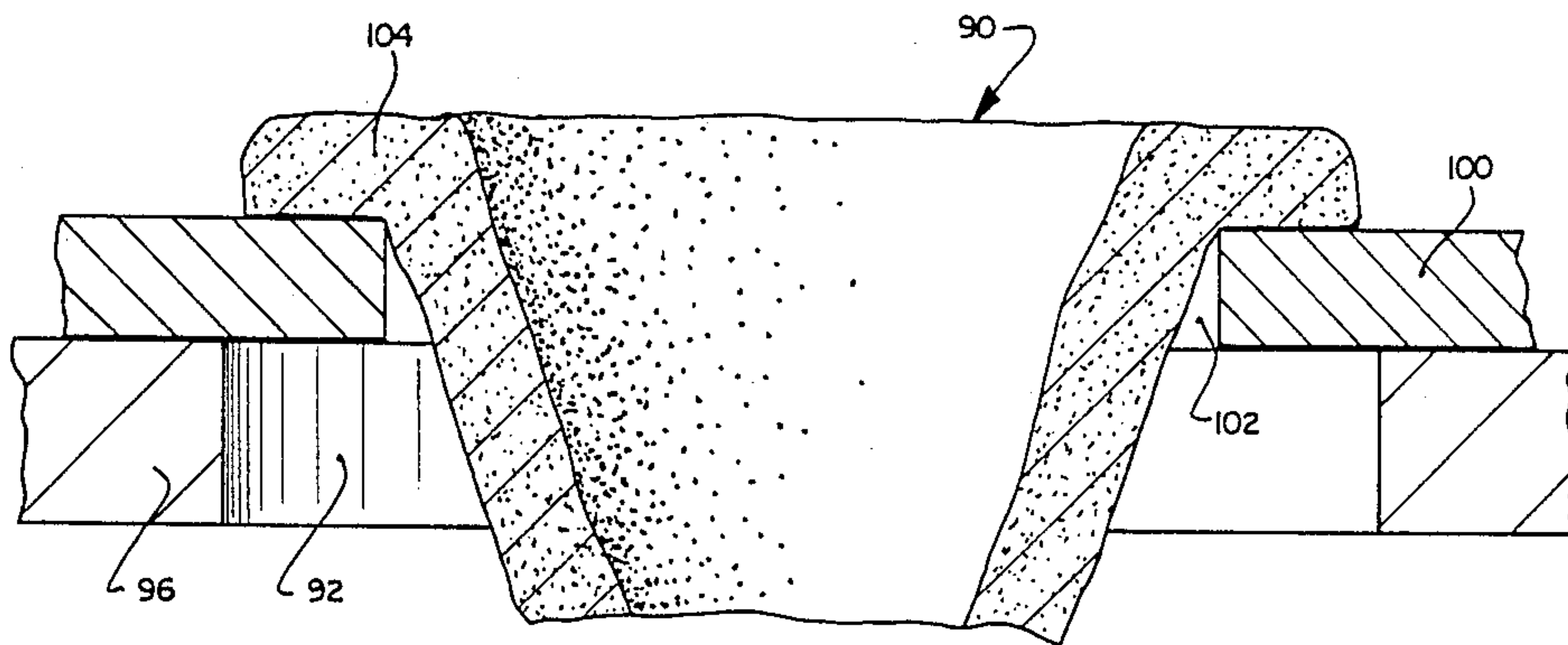


FIG. 6

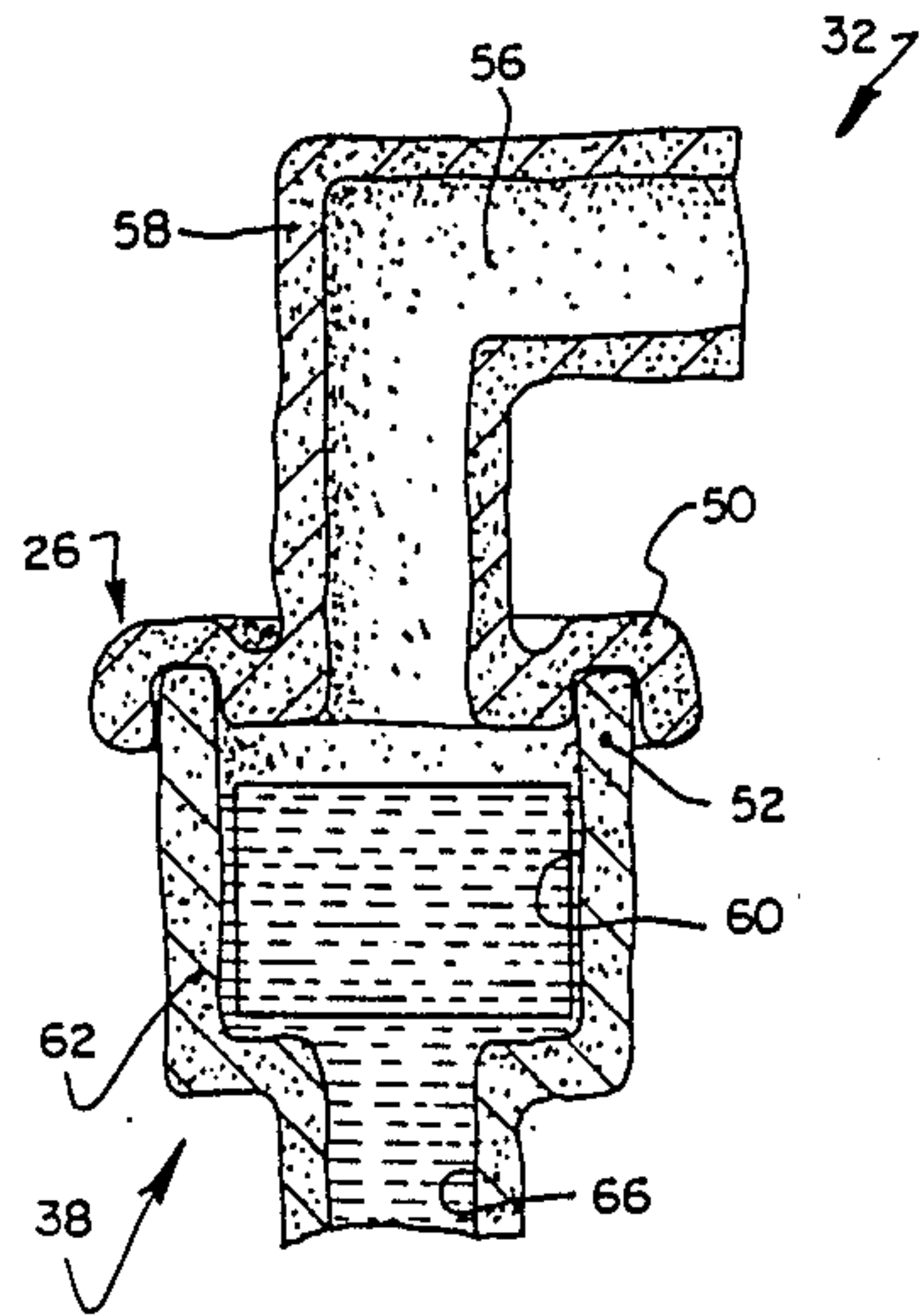


FIG. 8

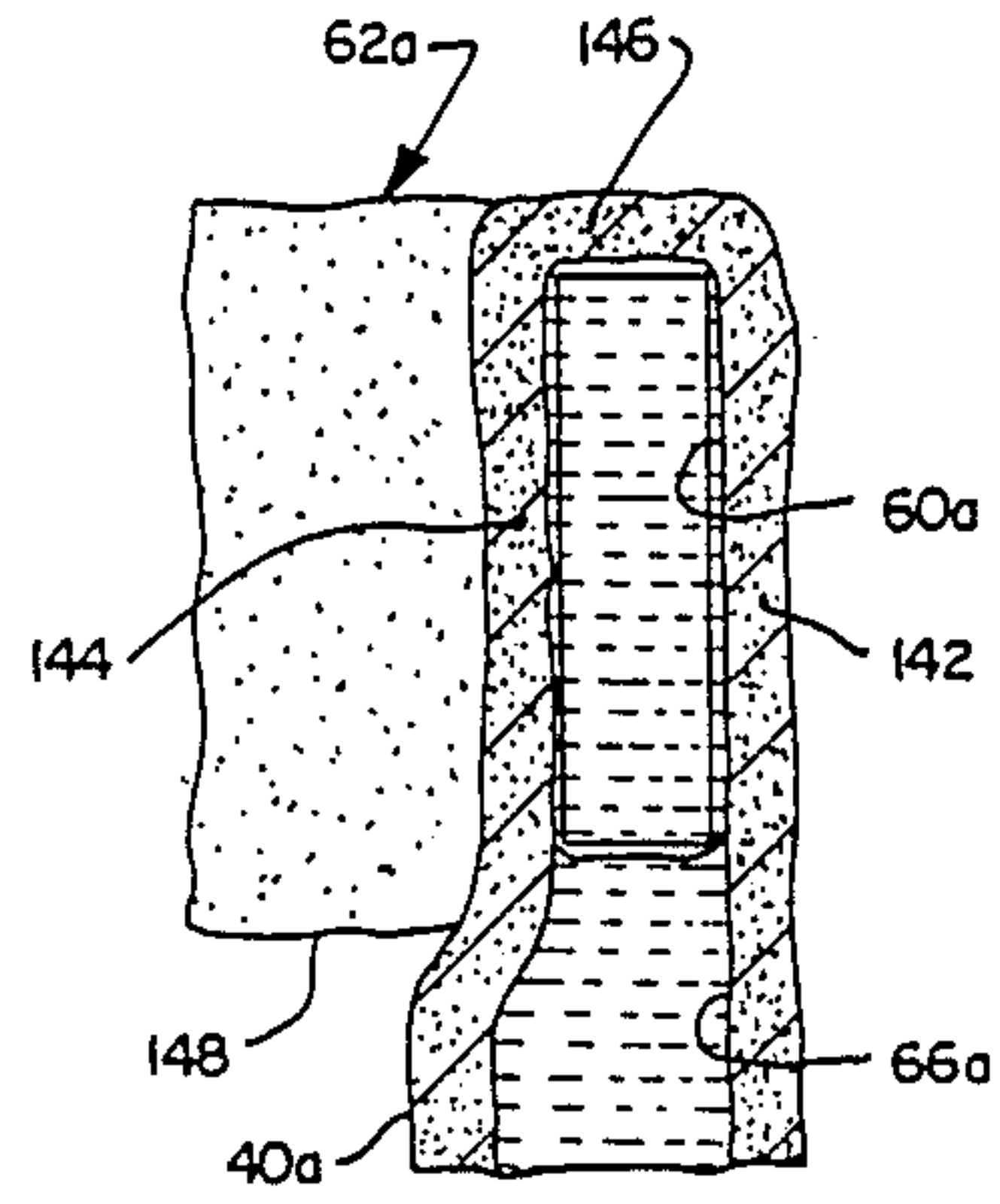


FIG. 9

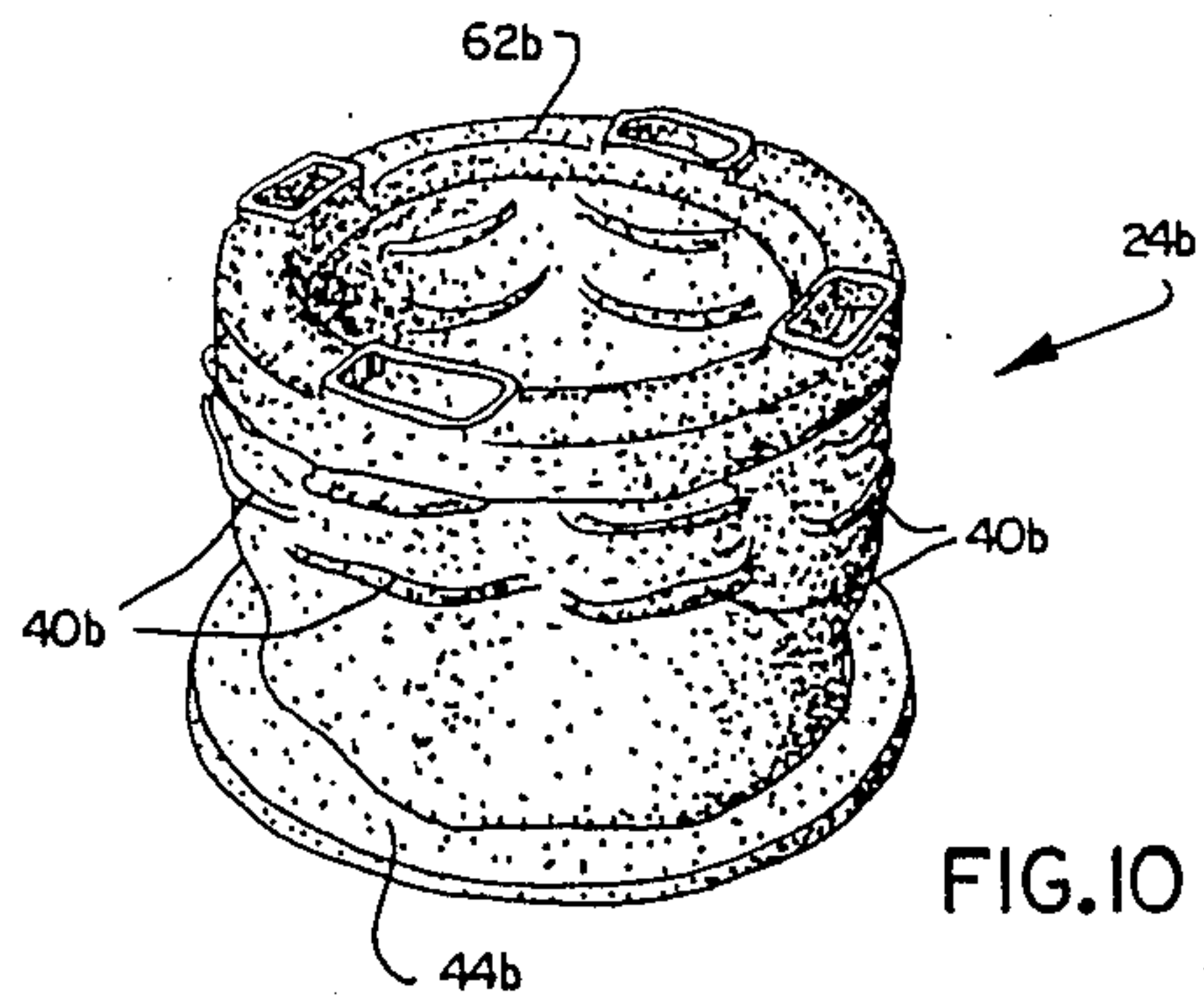


FIG. 10

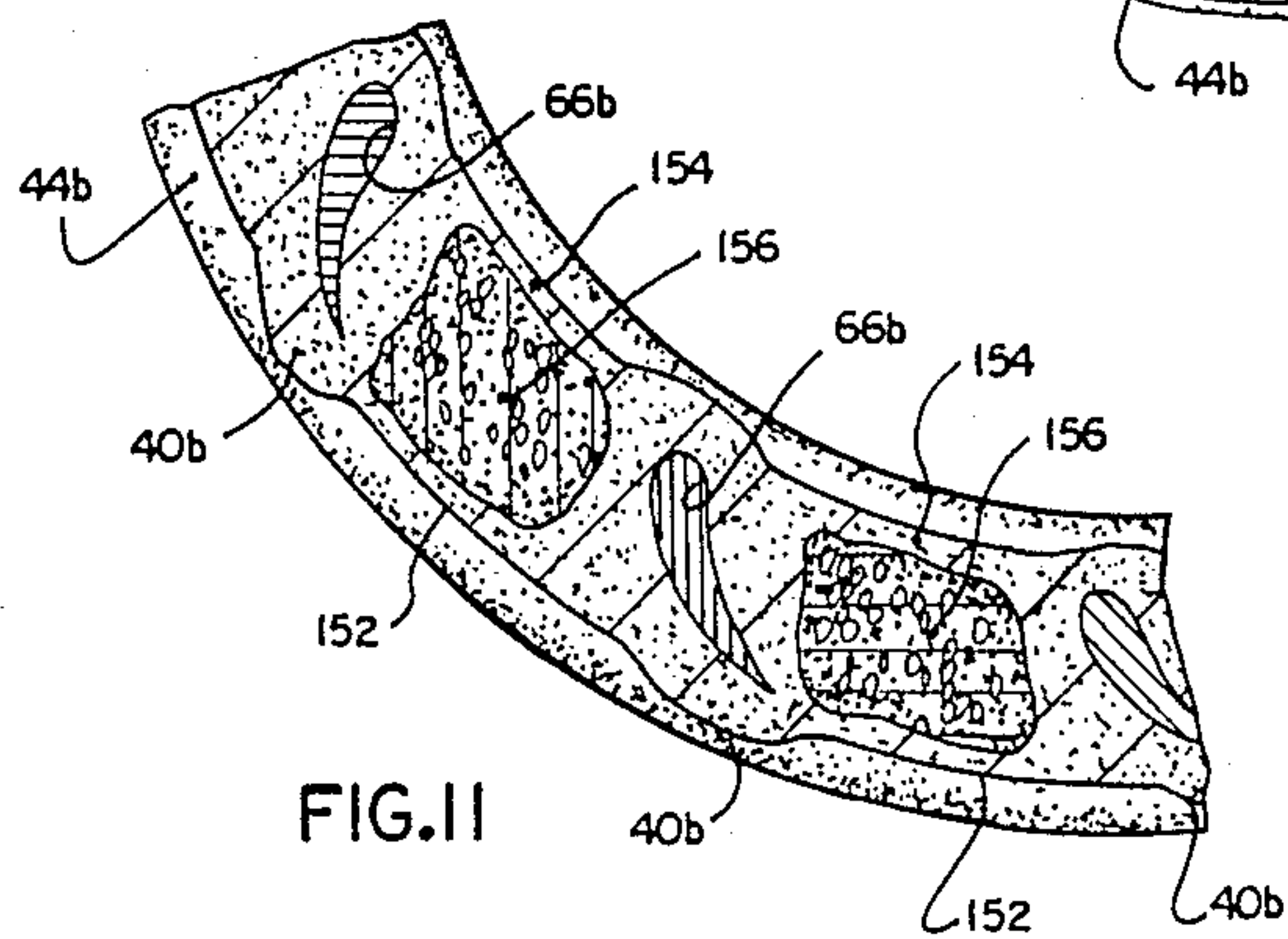


FIG. 11

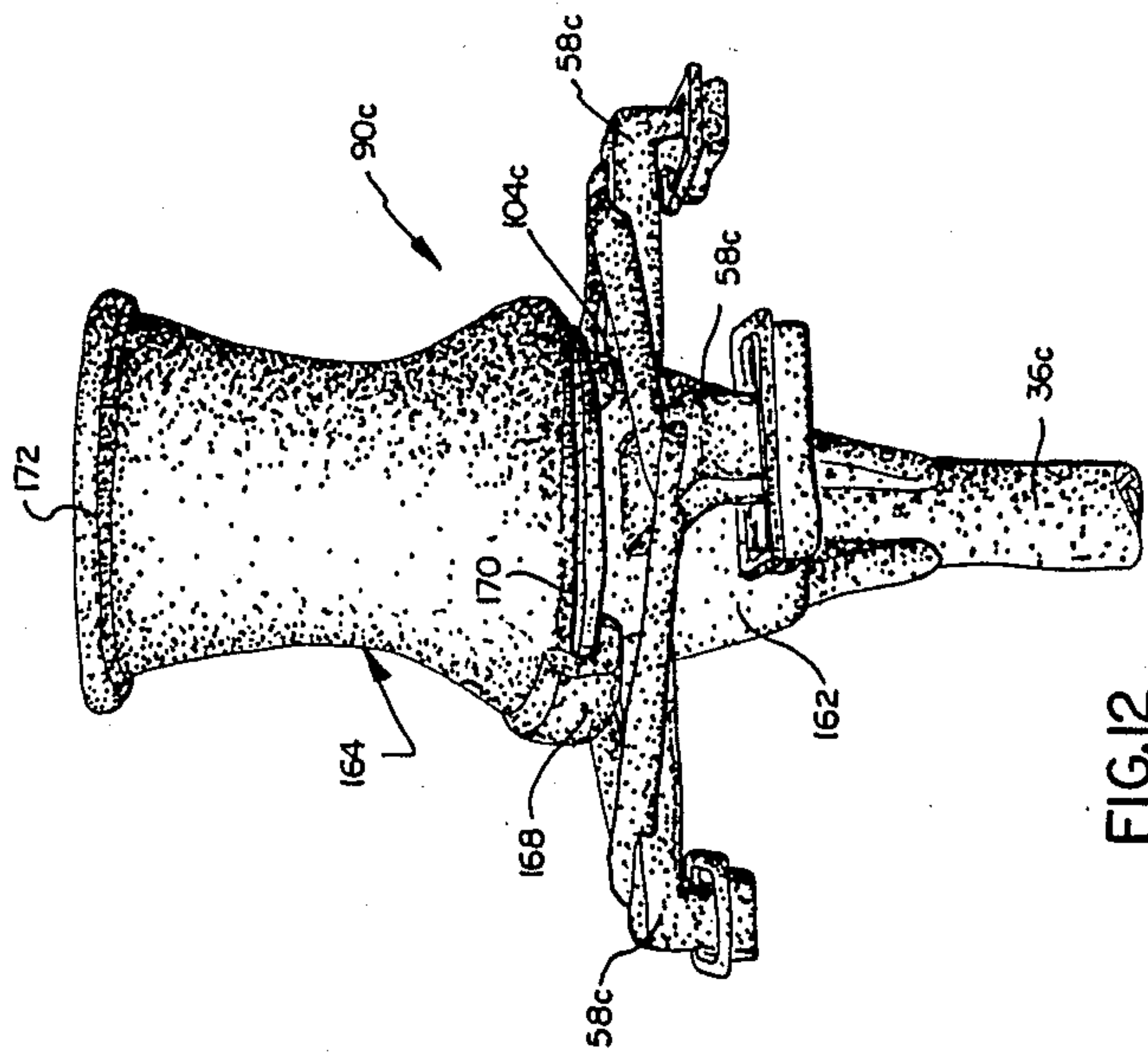


FIG. 12

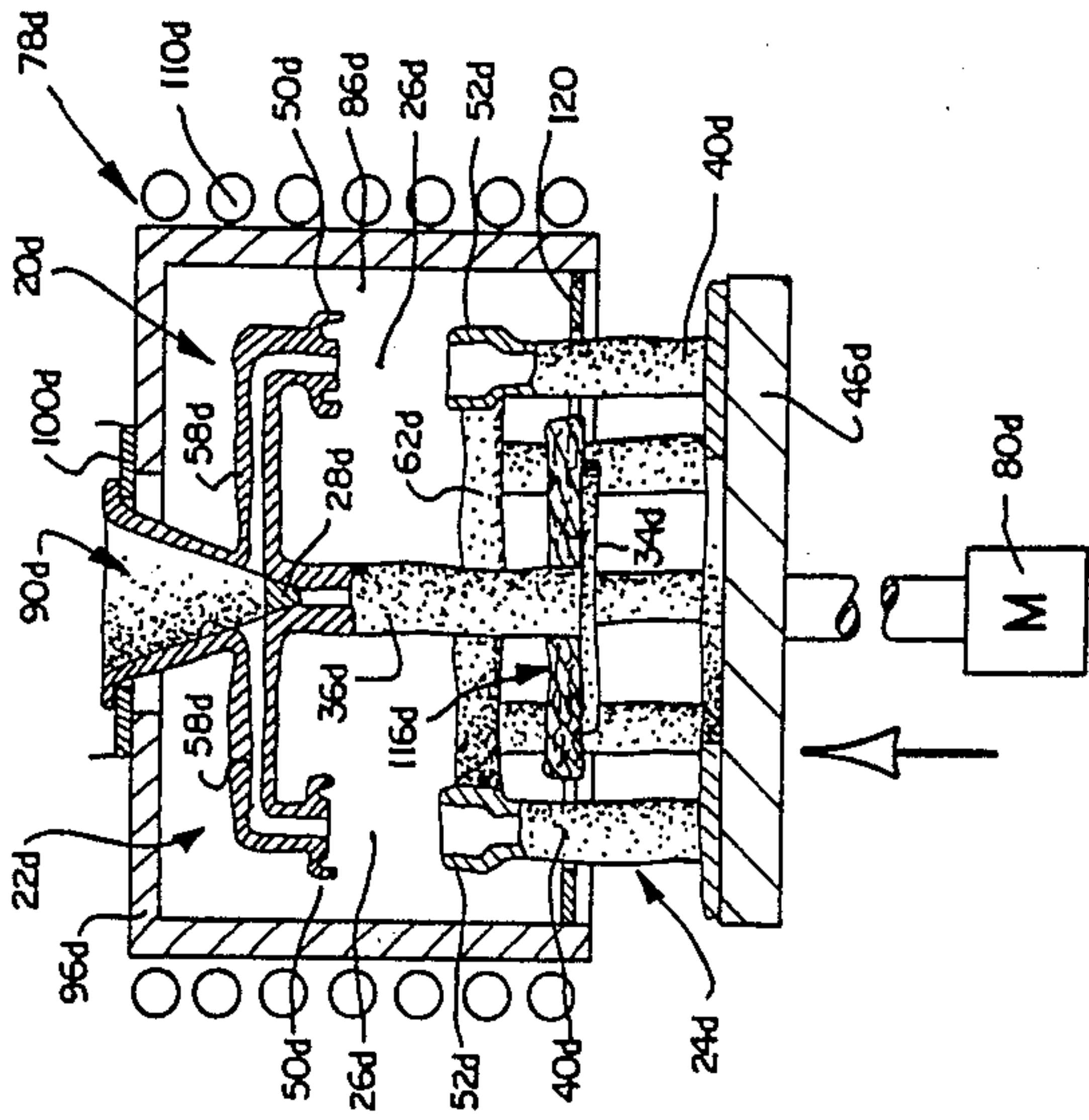


FIG. 13

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CASTING ARTICLES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a new and improved mold and method of using the mold to cast a plurality of articles.

Heat treatment of single crystal cast articles is facilitated if the articles are solidified with a fine dendritic structure. In an effort to obtain a relatively fine dendritic structure during the casting of the articles, U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,763,926 and 4,108,236 suggest that a large temperature gradient be established as a mold is withdrawn from a furnace. This is done by having the mold immersed in a bath of liquid coolant. To increase the temperature gradient during withdrawal of a mold from a furnace, U.S. Pat. No. 4,108,236 suggests that an insulated baffle be provided between the inside of the furnace and the liquid coolant bath.

The concept of using an annular molten metal distribution system which allows a mold to be completely withdrawn from a furnace past a baffle is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 3,810,504. In this patent, an annular array of article molds and the annular molten metal distribution system are supported in the furnace on an annular chill plate. The furnace has a cylindrical outer heater which circumscribes the mold and a cylindrical inner heater which is circumscribed by the mold. During withdrawal of the mold from the furnace, the mold moves downwardly between inner and outer heat sinks. The combination of inner and outer heaters, an annular chill plate, and inner and outer heat sinks results in a relatively complicated apparatus which is difficult to operate and maintain.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a method and apparatus to provide a relatively large temperature gradient between the inside and outside of a furnace as a mold is withdrawn from the furnace. The large temperature gradient is maintained, without a liquid coolant bath, even though article molds are disposed in an annular array having a relatively large diameter. The obtaining of the large temperature gradient is promoted by a baffle which blocks the radiation of heat from a central portion of the annular array of article molds to the outside of the furnace as the article molds are withdrawn from the furnace. The use of the baffle promotes the formation of horizontal isotherms with a relatively high temperature gradient for each unit length of portions of the article molds as they are withdrawn from the furnace.

The improved apparatus includes a plurality of article molds which are disposed in an annular array having an open central portion. Molten metal is distributed to the article molds through a primary distribution system which is separate from the article molds, a secondary distribution system which is connected with the article molds, and a plurality of separable joints which interconnect the primary and secondary distribution systems. The joints conduct molten metal from the primary distribution system to the secondary distribution system and allow the article molds to be moved away from the primary distribution system after the article molds have been filled with molten metal. The baffle is supported by the primary distribution system and blocks the radiation of heat through the open central portion of the

annular array of article molds as they are withdrawn from the furnace.

In order to support the primary distribution system and baffle in the furnace during withdrawal of the annular array of article molds from the furnace, the primary distribution system is connected with the furnace. During pouring of molten metal into a pour cup in the primary distribution system, the article molds are supported on a chill plate. Reaction forces are transmitted from the pour cup to the chill plate through a support post and baffle. During withdrawal of the article molds from the furnace, the post supports the baffle in the central portion of the annular array of article molds.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a new and improved method and apparatus for casting a plurality of articles and wherein a relatively large temperature gradient is maintained between the inside of a furnace and the outside of the furnace during withdrawal of the article molds from the furnace.

Another object of this invention is to provide a new and improved method and apparatus for casting articles wherein a relatively large temperature gradient with horizontal isotherms is established across at least a portion of a mold during withdrawal of the mold from the furnace.

Another object of this invention is to provide a new and improved casting method and apparatus in which a baffle is supported in a furnace by a molten metal distribution system during withdrawal of a mold from the furnace.

Another object of this invention is to provide a new and improved casting method and apparatus in which at least a portion of a system which distributes molten metal to article mold cavities is supported by a furnace during withdrawal of a mold from the furnace.

Another object of this invention is to provide a new and improved method and apparatus for casting a plurality of articles and wherein forces induced during the pouring of molten metal are transmitted through a baffle to a mold support member.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other objects and features of the present invention will become more apparent upon a consideration of the following description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a pictorial view of a mold constructed in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a pictorial view of a section of the mold of FIG. 1, illustrating the relationship between a primary molten metal distribution system, baffle plate and support post;

FIG. 3 is a pictorial view of another section of the mold of FIG. 1, illustrating the relationship between a secondary molten metal distribution system, a plurality of article molds and a base plate;

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary sectional view illustrating how the mold sections of FIGS. 2 and 3 are interconnected to enable molten metal to flow from the primary distribution system through separable joints to the secondary distribution system and article mold cavities;

FIG. 5 is schematic illustration depicting the manner in which the mold of FIG. 1 is positioned in a furnace;

FIG. 6 is an enlarged fragmentary sectional view illustrating the manner in which the mold of FIG. 1 is connected with an upper wall of the furnace of FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a schematic illustration, generally similar to FIG. 5, depicting how a baffle is supported by the primary distribution system as article molds are withdrawn from the furnace;

FIG. 8 is an enlarged fragmentary sectional view illustrating the construction of a separable joint which connects the primary distribution system in fluid communication with the secondary distribution system;

FIG. 9 is a fragmentary sectional view illustrating the construction of another embodiment of the secondary distribution system;

FIG. 10 is a pictorial illustration, generally similar to FIG. 3, illustrating an embodiment of the mold in which the article molds are interconnected to block heat radiation in an axial direction;

FIG. 11 is a fragmentary sectional view illustrating the construction of a wall of the mold of FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 is a pictorial view illustrating an embodiment of the mold in which a pour cup in the primary distribution system has a base section and an extension section; and

FIG. 13, is a schematic illustration, generally similar to FIG. 5, depicting a furnace having a reusable primary distribution system and baffle.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

Mold—General Description

An improved ceramic mold 20 constructed in accordance with the present invention is illustrated in FIG. 1. The ceramic mold 20 has an upper section 22 and a lower section 24 which are interconnected at a plurality of separable joints 26. With the exception of a support post plug 28 (FIG. 4), the upper mold section 22 is formed as one piece. The lower mold section 24 is also formed as one piece. The upper and lower mold sections 22 and 24 are made of a known ceramic mold material containing fused silica, zircon and other refractory materials in combination with binders.

The upper mold section 22 (FIG. 2) includes a ceramic primary molten metal distribution system 32 into which molten metal is poured and then conducted to the lower mold section 24 through the joints 26. A horizontal circular ceramic baffle plate 34 is connected with the primary distribution system 32 by a vertical support post 36. In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, the cylindrical ceramic support post 36 is hollow, having a central passage 38 (FIG. 4) which is blocked by the plug 28. However, if desired, the support post 36 may be formed of a solid body of ceramic material to increase the strength of the post.

The lower mold section 24 (FIG. 3) has a ceramic annular secondary molten metal distribution system 38 which is connected in fluid communication with a plurality of vertically extending article molds 40. The ceramic article molds 40 are disposed in an annular array which is coaxial with the secondary distribution system 38. The annular array of article molds 40 has an open central portion which facilitates heat transfer between radially inwardly facing side surfaces of the article molds 40. In the illustrated embodiment of the lower mold section 24, there are eight article molds 40 disposed in an annular array having an outside diameter of approximately eighteen inches. Of course, a greater or lesser number of article molds 40 could be disposed in either a larger or smaller annular array if desired.

An annular ceramic base plate 44 is integrally formed with the lower end portions of the article molds 40 to

stabilize the molds and promote sealing engagement with a circular chill plate or support member 46 (FIG. 4). The annular base plate 44 circumscribes the baffle plate 34 when the mold 20 is supported on the chill plate 46. The annular base plate 44, annular array of article molds 40, annular distribution ring 62, circular baffle plate 34 and support post 36 are all disposed in a coaxial relationship (FIG. 1).

The joints 26 (FIGS. 4 and 8) perform the dual functions of conducting molten metal from the primary distribution system 32 to the secondary distribution system 38 and enabling the upper and lower mold sections 22 and 24 to be separated. Each of the identical joints 26 includes an upper section 50 which telescopically and sealingly engages a lower section 52 of the joint. The upper section 50 connects a passage 56 in a radially extending runner 58 with an annular distribution channel 60 in a distribution ring 62 of the secondary distribution system 38 (FIG. 4). The annular distribution channel 60 is connected with cavities 66 disposed in each of the article molds 40. The mold cavities 66 have configurations corresponding to the configurations of the articles to be cast.

It is contemplated that the mold 20 will be used to cast single crystal turbine engine components. Therefore, each of the article mold cavities 66 is connected in fluid communication with a helical crystal selector 70 and starter cavity 72 (FIG. 4). The starter cavities 72 are open, at their lower ends, to the chill plate 46.

The one piece ceramic upper and lower mold sections 22 and 24 are formed by repetitively dipping a wax pattern in a slurry of ceramic mold material. The wax pattern may be formed as one piece having a portion with a configuration corresponding to the upper section 22 of the mold 20 and a portion with a configuration corresponding to the configuration of the lower section 24 of the mold. After the wax pattern has been repetitively dipped, it is covered with a layer of ceramic mold material.

The layer of ceramic mold material is partially dried, de-waxed and fired. The resulting mold is then cut at the joints 26 and at a circular junction between the baffle and base plates 34 and 44 to separate the upper and lower mold sections 22 and 24. However, if desired, the mold 20 could be formed by repetitively dipping two separate patterns. Thus, one pattern having a configuration corresponding to the upper section 22 of the mold and a second pattern corresponding to the configuration of the lower section 24 of the mold could be used.

Casting Articles—Preheating Mold

The mold 20 is used to cast a plurality of articles, such as single crystal airfoils for a turbine engine. When a plurality of articles are to be cast, the circular chill plate 46 (FIG. 5) is moved downwardly away from a furnace 78 by operation of a reversible motor 80. Once the chill plate 46 has been lowered, the mold 20 is placed on the chill plate. The motor 80 is then operated to raise the chill plate 46 in the manner indicated by the arrow 82 in FIG. 5.

As the chill plate 46 moves upwardly toward the furnace 78, the mold 20 enters a cylindrical chamber 86 in the furnace 78. Continued upward movement of the chill plate 46 moves the upper end portion of a molten metal receiving element or pour cup 90 in the primary distribution system 32 through a circular opening 92

formed in the center of a circular upper wall 96 of the furnace 78 (FIG. 5). The pour cup 90 is disposed in a coaxial relationship with the annular array of article molds 40 and the secondary distribution system 38. Although the pour cup 90 has been shown herein as having one particular configuration, it could have other configurations if desired as long as it functions to receive molten metal.

Once the mold 20 has been moved into the furnace chamber 86 with the upper end portion of the pour cup 90 extending through the upper wall 96 of the furnace, the upper section 22 of the mold is connected with the furnace. To accomplish this, a plate 100 (FIG. 6) having a generally U-shaped opening 102, is moved between the upper wall 96 of the furnace and an annular rim or lip 104 on the pour cup 90. Although the connector member 100 blocks downward movement of the pour cup 90, the mold 20 is still supported by the chill plate 46 (see FIG. 5). Thus, at this time, the lower surface of the pour cup rim 104 lightly engages or is slightly spaced from the upper surface of the connector member 100. This prevents breakage of the rim 104 of the pour cup 90 during subsequent pouring of molten metal into the pour cup.

Once the mold 20 has been positioned in and connected with the furnace 78, a helical induction heating coil 110 is energized to heat the mold 20 with energy conducted through a generally cylindrical graphite susceptor 114. The entire mold 20 is preheated to a temperature of approximately 2800° F. During preheating of the mold, the copper chill plate 46 is cooled by a flow of a suitable liquid through the chill plate in a known manner. The furnace 78 has the same general construction shown in U.S. Pat. No. 3,841,384.

During preheating, heat loss from the furnace chamber 86 is retarded by a circular baffle 116. The baffle 116 covers a portion of the chill plate 46 to block radiation of heat to the chill plate. The baffle 116 is disposed at the lower end of the support post 38 in a coaxial relationship with the annular array of article molds 40, pour cup 90, and furnace chamber 86. The baffle 116 is formed by the ceramic baffle plate 34 and a body of insulating material 118 disposed on the baffle plate 34 and extending outwardly over the radially inner portion of the base plate 44 (see FIG. 4). The baffle 116 is coaxial with the distribution ring 62 and has an outside diameter which is slightly smaller than the inside diameter of the distribution ring.

The insulating material 118 is a circular plate of graphite having a reflective upper surface. The reflectivity of the upper surface of the insulating material 118 is substantially greater than the reflectivity of the ceramic baffle plate 34. The insulating material 118 could be graphite foil which is commercially available under the trademark "GRAPHFOIL". Other insulating materials could be used if desired.

An annular exterior baffle 120 is fixedly connected to the furnace 78. The baffle 120 blocks the radiation of heat from the furnace chamber 86 along the outside of lower section 24 of the mold 20.

Casting Articles—Pouring Molten Metal

Once the mold 20 has been preheated, molten metal is poured into the pour cup 90 in the primary distribution system 32. The rate of pouring of the molten metal is relatively high. Therefore, substantial forces result from the combined effect of the weight of the molten metal in the pour cup 90 and runners 58 and the impacting of

the molten metal against the sides of the pour cup. These forces are transmitted from the bottom of the pour cup 90 to the upper end portion of the support post 36 which is coaxial with the pour cup 90.

The lower end portion of the support post 36 is connected with the baffle plate 34. Therefore, the pouring induced forces are transmitted from the support post 36 to the baffle plate 34. A flat circular bottom surface 122 (see FIG. 4) of the baffle plate 34 is pressed downwardly against the flat circular upper surface 124 of the chill plate 46 to transmit pouring induced forces to the chill plate.

The transmission of the pouring induced forces to the chill plate 46 is substantially independent of the article molds 40. This is because the post 36 supports the primary distribution system 32. The joints 26 are loosely interconnected. Thus, the upper portion 50 (FIG. 4) of each joint 26 rests lightly on or is slightly spaced from the lower portion 52 of the joint. However, the flat bottom surface 122 of the baffle plate 34 abuttingly engages the upper surface 124 of the chill plate 46. Therefore, the forces generated during the pouring of molten metal into the pour cup 90 are transmitted straight downwardly through the post 36 to the baffle plate 34 and chill plate 46.

The ceramic material of the mold 20 is relatively weak in tension and relatively strong in compression. Since the pouring induced forces load the post 36 and baffle plate 34 in compression, there is a minimal tendency for the post and baffle plate to break. If desired, the hollow post 36 could be strengthened by filling the cavity 38 with ceramic material or by providing a ceramic pattern post, rather than a wax pattern post.

If the pouring induced forces were transmitted to the article molds 40 through the runners 58 in the primary distribution system 32, portions of the runners would be stressed in tension with a resulting tendency for the runners to crack or break. Similarly, if the pouring induced forces were transmitted to the upper wall 96 of the furnace through the lip 104 of the pour cup 90, there would be a tendency for the pour cup to crack. By transmitting the forces straight downwardly through the post 36 and baffle plate 34 to the chill plate 46, any tendency for the mold 20 to break is minimized. The molten metal flows radially outwardly from the pour cup 90 through the passages 56 in the runners 58 to the joints 26. Reinforcing rods 128 have been provided between the runners 58 (FIG. 2) to enable the runners to carry the weight of the molten metal without cracking. The molten metal flows from the runners 58 through the joints 26 to the annular distribution channel 60 in the distribution ring 62 of the secondary distribution system 38. The annular distribution channel 60 is connected in fluid communication with each of the article mold cavities 66 in the article molds 40.

The molten metal flows through the article mold cavities 66 to helical passages in the single crystal selectors 70. The molten metal then flows through the single crystal selectors 70 to the starter cavities 72. The cylindrical starter cavities 72 are open-ended so that the molten metal in the starter cavities is exposed directly to the liquid cooled chill plate 46. The annular base plate 44 stabilizes the lower end portions of the article molds 40 and provides a firm seal with the upper side surface 124 of the chill plate 46.

When the starter cavities 72, single crystal selectors 70, article mold cavities 66, and distribution channel 60 have been filled with molten metal, the pour cup 90 and

runner passages 56 are empty (FIG. 4). Therefore, the upper and lower mold sections 22 and 24 can be separated at the joints 26 without spilling any metal.

Casting Articles—Mold Withdrawal

Once the article molds 40 have been filled with molten metal, the lower section 24 of the mold 20 is separated from the upper section 22 and withdrawn from the furnace 78 in the manner illustrated in FIG. 7. In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, the article molds 40 are withdrawn from the furnace 78 by moving the chill plate 46 downwardly. However, the article molds 40 could be withdrawn from the furnace by moving the furnace upwardly.

As the chill plate 46 is moved downwardly by the motor 80 to withdraw the lower section 24 of the mold from the furnace chamber 86, the upper section 22 of the mold is supported by the upper wall 96 of the furnace 78. Thus, the weight of the upper section 22 of the mold is carried by the rim 104 of the pour cup 90. Since the pour cup 90 and runners 58 are empty, the weight which must be carried by the pour cup and rim 104 is relatively small. The post 36 and baffle 116 are supported from the pour cup 90 by the post 36.

As the lower section 24 of the mold is withdrawn from the furnace chamber 86, the molten metal in the starter cavities 72 and helical selectors 70 solidifies. A single crystal of metal grows from each of the helical selectors 70 to the article mold cavities 66. Continued downward movement of the mold 24 results in the single crystals of metal growing through the article mold cavities 66 upwardly to the distribution channel 60. This results in the casting of single crystal articles in the molds 40.

The susceptibility of the single crystal articles to heat treatment is enhanced if the articles are solidified with a fine dendritic structure. In order to obtain a fine dendritic structure during the solidification of the single crystal articles in the mold cavities 66, there should be a relatively large temperature gradient between the portion of the article molds 40 disposed in the furnace cavity 86 above the baffle 116 and portions of the article molds 40 below the baffle. In the past, the obtaining of a large temperature gradient has been attempted by reducing the size of the chill plate 46. Thus, by reducing the diameter of the chill plate from eighteen inches to approximately six inches, a greater temperature gradient may be obtained between the furnace chamber 86 and the outside of the furnace. However, the use of a smaller chill plate is relatively uneconomical since only a few article molds can be positioned on the chill plate.

The mold 20 enables a relatively large temperature gradient to be maintained with a relatively large chill plate. This is because during withdrawal of the lower mold section 24 from the furnace 78, the portions of the article molds 40 above the baffle 116 cannot radiate heat to the portions of the article molds below the baffle. The portions of the article molds 40 above the baffle 116 can radiate heat to each other across the open center of the array of article molds.

As the lower section 24 of the mold 20 is separated from the upper section 22 and withdrawn from the furnace chamber 86, heat from the coil 110 is transmitted, by radiation, directly to the radially outwardly facing side portions of the article molds 40. Due to the open center configuration of the annular array of article molds 40, heat can be readily radiated between the sides of the furnace 78 and the radially inwardly facing sides

of the article molds 40. This results in generally horizontal isotherms extending across the lower section 24 of the mold 20.

The use of the baffle 116 to block the radiation of heat through the open center of the annular array of article molds 40 results in a temperature gradient which is approximately twice as great as the temperature gradients obtained with a prior art mold. The increased temperature gradient results in a corresponding reduction in the extent of the mushy zone, that is, the zone between the liquidus and solidus curves. Thus, there is a very high temperature gradient for each unit of length of portions of the article molds 40 disposed immediately above and below the baffle.

The extent of the mushy zone is inversely proportional to temperature gradient. By doubling the temperature gradient, the extent of the mushy zone is reduced by approximately fifty percent. This results in a relatively short dendritic structure which has a minimum of dendrite breakage and spurious nucleation. Although the mold 20 is particularly advantageous for use in the forming of single crystal articles, it should be understood that the mold could be used for forming other directionally solidified articles, such as articles having a columnar grain.

The obtaining of a relatively large temperature gradient between the inside and the outside of the furnace is enhanced by having the chill 46 move away from the ceramic baffle plate 34 as the article molds 40 are withdrawn from the furnace 78. This results in the upper side surface 124 of the chill plate 46 being exposed at a circular opening 132 (FIGS. 3 and 7) formed on the inside of the annular base plate 44. Therefore, heat is radiated from the portions of the article molds 40 beneath the baffle 116 to the relatively cool exposed surface of the chill plate 46 at the opening 132.

The size of the opening 132 can be varied to either increase or decrease the temperature gradient. Thus, the larger the diameter of the opening 132, the greater will be the temperature gradient between the inside and outside of the furnace 78. However, the opening 132 cannot be so large as to impair the ability of the baffle 116 to block the radiation of heat from the inside of the furnace chamber 86 to the chill plate 46. If desired, a layer of foil could be placed over the chill plate 46 at the opening 132 to decrease the temperature gradient.

The ability of the baffle 116 to block the radiation of heat from the furnace chamber 86 is enhanced by having the insulating material 118 extend radially outwardly to a diameter which is only slightly smaller than the inside diameter of the annular distribution ring 62. Since the baffle 116 has a diameter which is slightly smaller than the inside diameter of the distribution ring 62 in the secondary distribution system 38, the lower section 24 of the mold 20 can be completely withdrawn from the furnace chamber 86 by moving the chill plate 46 downwardly. As the lower section 24 of the mold 20 is withdrawn from the furnace 78, a relatively large temperature gradient is established for each unit of length of the portions of the mold assembly 24 which are immediately above and immediately below the baffle 116.

In the embodiment of the invention illustrated in FIGS. 1-8, the upper section 22 of the mold 20 is formed of a material which is capable of only being used during the pouring of molten metal into a single lower section 24 of the mold. Therefore, the upper section 22 of the mold must be removed from the furnace after the

lower section 24 of the mold is withdrawn from the furnace. This is accomplished by reversing the operation of the motor 80 to raise the chill plate 46 and lower section 24 of the mold back toward the furnace 78. At this time, the furnace coils 110 are de-energized and the metal in the lower mold section 24 has solidified.

Once the lower mold section 24 has been raised sufficiently to engage the upper mold section 22 at the joints 26 (FIG. 5), the connector member 100 is moved away from the lip 104 of the pour cup 90 to release the upper section of the mold. The upper mold section 22 then rests on the lower section 24 of the mold. The chill plate 46 is then lowered to withdraw the entire mold 20 from the furnace 78.

Once the entire mold 20 has been removed from the furnace, the upper section 22 of the mold is discarded and the cast articles are removed from the lower section 24 of the mold. Although it is preferred to remove the upper section 22 of the mold from the furnace by raising the lower section 24 of the mold and chill plate 46, the upper section of the mold could be removed in other ways. For example, the lower section 24 of the mold could be removed from the chill plate 46 and the upper section 22 merely dropped downwardly into a receptacle held above the chill plate to prevent damage to the chill plate.

In the illustrated embodiment of the invention, it is preferred to support the baffle plate 34 and insulation 118 from the pour cup 90 with the post 36. However, the baffle plate 34 and insulation 118 could be supported in other ways. For example, a plurality of ceramic rods could extend between the baffle plate 34 and the runner reinforcing rods 128 (FIG. 2). However, to enable the lower section 24 of the mold to be completely withdrawn from the furnace 78 past the stationary baffle 116, the support for the baffle is independent of support elements extending radially outwardly from the baffle to the vertical sides of the furnace.

The mold 20 has been disclosed herein as having single crystal selectors 70. However, it is contemplated that the mold could be used in conjunction with seed crystals. If this was done, the single crystal selectors 70 would be omitted. Although the mold 20 is particularly advantageous in the casting of single crystal articles, the mold could be used in conjunction with the casting of other articles, such as columnar grained articles.

Distribution Ring—Second Embodiment

In the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 1-8, the annular distribution ring 62 (FIGS. 1 and 3) has a relatively short axial extent compared to its radial extent (FIG. 4). It is believed that the transfer of heat between the furnace and the distribution ring could be improved and the amount of waste metal in the distribution ring minimized by modifying the distribution ring to have the configuration illustrated in FIG. 9. Since the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 9 is generally similar to the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 1-8, similar numerals will be utilized to designate similar components, the suffix letter "a" being associated with FIG. 9 to avoid confusion.

The annular distribution ring 62a (FIG. 9) defines an annular distribution channel 60a which is connected in fluid communication with the article mold cavities 66a in the article molds 40a. In addition, the distribution ring 62a is connected in fluid communication with the primary distribution system at separable joints in the same manner as shown in FIG. 8.

In accordance with a feature of the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 9, the distribution ring 62a has relatively long axially extending side walls 142 and 144 with relatively short radial side walls 146 and 148. This results in the side surface area of the distribution ring exposed to the heat radiating from the furnace being maximized. However, since the distribution channel 60a has a relatively small radial extent or width, the amount of molten metal contained in the distribution ring 60a tends to be minimized. Since the molten metal in the distribution channel 60a is surplus, that is, this excess metal is cut from the cast articles and discarded, it is desirable to minimize the volume of the distribution channel 60a.

Lower Mold Section—Second Embodiment

In the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 1-8, the article molds 40 are arranged in an annular array with open spaces between the article molds (see FIGS. 1 and 3). The open space between the article molds 40 allows some heat to be radiated axially downwardly past the baffle 116 as the lower section 24 of the mold is withdrawn from the furnace. In the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 10, the open space between the article molds is blocked to prevent the axial transmission of heat between the article molds. Since the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 10 and 11 is generally similar to the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 1-8, similar numerals will be utilized to designate similar components, the suffix letter "b" being associated with the numerals of FIGS. 10 and 11 to avoid confusion.

The lower section 24b of a mold has a plurality of article molds, indicated generally at 40b, with mold cavities 66b (FIG. 11) which are interconnected by wall or blocking sections 152. The wall or blocking sections 152 are formed by a layer 154 of ceramic mold material over the bodies 156 of ceramic foam. The blocking sections 152 interconnect the article molds 40 to form a solid annular mold wall (see FIG. 10). The solid annular mold wall blocks the axially downward radiation of heat between the article molds 40b.

The wall of the lower mold section 24b extends both inwardly and outwardly of the distribution ring 62b. Thus, the annular mold wall has an inside diameter which is less than the inside diameter of the distribution ring 62b. Similarly, the annular mold wall has an outside diameter which is greater than the outside diameter of the distribution ring 62b.

When the lower mold section 24b is withdrawn from a furnace, in a manner similar to that indicated schematically in FIG. 7, heat cannot be radiated downwardly through axial extending spaces between an annular distribution ring 62b and an annular base plate 44b. To form the lower section 24b of the mold with a solid wall, the ceramic foam 156 is mounted between wax patterns which form the article mold cavities 66b. When the mold pattern is repetitively dipped in a slurry of ceramic mold material, layers 154 of ceramic mold material build up around the ceramic foam 156 to form the lower mold section 24b with a continuous annular wall.

Pour Cup—Second Embodiment

It is desirable to provide a relatively large vertical space between the open central portion of the annular array of article molds 44 and the upper wall 96 of the furnace 78 (see FIG. 5). Although this could be done by

increasing the vertical extent of the runners 58 and support post 36, it may be preferred to increase the vertical extent of the pour cup 90. In the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 12, the vertical extent of the pour cup has been increased to increase the distance between the upper wall 96 of the furnace and the open central section of the annular array of article molds. Since the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 12 is generally similar to the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 1-8, similar numerals will be utilized to designate similar components, the suffix letter "c" being associated with the numerals of FIG. 12 in order to avoid confusion.

A pour cup 90c includes a base section 162 having the same general configuration as the pour cup 90 of FIG. 4, and a hollow extension section 164. The extension section 64 has a generally circular configuration throughout its axial extent with a lower lip 168 extending inwardly from a lower end portion of the extension. The lip 168 extends half way around the lower edge portion 170 of the extension 164. The lip 168 engages the rim 104c on the base section 162 of the pour cup 90c to interconnect the base section 162 and extension 164.

The hollow extension section 164 curves inwardly from the lower edge 170 and then flares outwardly to an upper rim 172. The upper rim 172 of the pour cup extension 164 is engaged by a connector member to connect the pour cup 90c with the upper wall of a furnace in much the same manner as in which the connector member engages the rim 104 on the pour cup 90 of FIG. 6. The use of the hollow extension 164 results in the runners 58c being positioned further from the upper wall of the furnace to facilitate the radiating of heat to the inwardly facing side surfaces of article molds.

Upper Mold Section—Second Embodiment

In the embodiment of the invention illustrated in FIGS. 1-8, the upper section 22 of the mold is used for a single casting operation and then discarded. However, if the upper section of the mold was formed of a relatively durable material, it could be reused. This would eliminate the necessity of forming an upper section 22 for each of the molds and would eliminate the necessity of removing an upper mold section from the furnace each time a mold is cast.

In the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 13, the mold has a reusable upper mold section. Since the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 13 is generally similar to the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGS. 1-8, similar numerals will be utilized to designate similar components, the suffix letter "d" being associated with the embodiment of the invention shown in FIG. 13 to avoid confusion.

A mold 20d has a reusable upper section 22d and a nonreusable lower section 24d. The upper section 22d of the mold is formed of alumina and can withstand repeated exposures to hot molten metal without deterioration. The configuration of the upper mold section 22d is the same as the configuration of the upper section 22 of the mold 20.

The reusable mold section 22d is formed as one piece, with the exception of a plug 28d, of alumina. The upper mold section 22d has a pour cup 90d which is connected with runners 58d. A support post 36d extends downwardly from the lower end portion of the pour cup 90d to a baffle plate 34d. A connector member 100d cooperates with the pour cup 90d to connect the upper mold section 22d with the upper wall 96d of the furnace 78d.

Since the upper section 22d of the mold is reusable, it does not have to be released each time molten metal is poured into a non-reusable lower section 24d.

The non-reusable lower section 24d includes a distribution ring 62d which is connected in fluid communication with a plurality of article molds 40d. The lower mold section 24d is supported on a chill plate 46d. During pouring of the molten metal into the pour cup 90d, the baffle plate 34d rests on the upper side surface of the chill plate 46d. This enables forces generated by the pouring of the molten metal to be transmitted directly through the post 36d and baffle plate 34d to the chill plate 46d.

When a plurality of articles are to be cast in a lower section 24d of a mold, the lower section 24d is raised upwardly into the furnace chamber 86d. Upwardly extending joint sections 52d on the lower mold section 24d are aligned with upper joint sections 50d. Therefore, the joints 26d between the upper and lower sections are closed as the lower mold section 24d moves into the furnace chamber 86d. The upward movement of the lower section 24d is stopped when the joints 26d have been closed and the weight of the upper portion 22d has been transmitted through the support post 36d and baffle plate 34d to the chill plate 46d.

After molten metal has been poured into the pour cup 90d, the chill plate 46d is retracted to withdraw the lower mold section 24d from the furnace chamber 86d. As the lower section 24d of the mold is withdrawn from the furnace 78d, the baffle 116d blocks the radiation of heat from the inside of the furnace to the outside of the furnace. Therefore, a relatively large temperature gradient is established between portions of the article molds 40d disposed above the baffle 116d and the portions of the article molds 40d disposed below the baffle.

Once the upper mold section 24d has been lowered from the furnace chamber, it can be removed from the chill plate 46d. The cast articles are then removed from the mold 24d. Of course, during the removal of the cast articles from the lower mold section 24d, the lower mold section is destroyed.

Additional articles may be cast by providing another lower mold section 24d. The second lower mold section 24d is placed on the chill plate 46d and raised into the furnace 78d to engage the reusable upper mold section 22d. A next succeeding group of articles is then cast by pouring molten metal into the pour cup 90d, conducting a flow of metal to the article molds in the second lower mold section. Additional lower mold sections 24d are subsequently raised into the furnace 78d, filled with molten metal conducted from the reusable upper mold section 22d and then withdrawn from the furnace. Of course, if the upper mold section 22d deteriorates over a period of time, it will be replaced.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing description, it is apparent that the present invention is directed to a method and apparatus which provides a relatively large temperature gradient between the inside and outside of the furnace 78 as the mold 20 is withdrawn from the furnace. This relatively large temperature gradient is maintained even though the article molds 40 are disposed in a large diameter annular array. The obtaining of the large temperature gradient is promoted by having a baffle 116 which blocks the radiation of heat from a central portion of the annular array of article molds 40 to the outside of the furnace 78 as the article molds are withdrawn from the

furnace. The use of the baffle 116 promotes the formation of horizontal isotherms with a relatively high temperature gradient for each unit of length of portions of the article molds 40 as they are withdrawn from the furnace 78.

The improved apparatus includes a plurality of article molds 40 which are disposed in an annular array having an open central portion. Molten metal is distributed to the article molds 40 through a primary distribution system 32 which is separate from the article molds, a secondary distribution system 38 which is connected with the article molds, and a plurality of separable joints 26 which interconnect the primary and secondary distribution systems. The joints 26 conduct molten metal from the primary distribution system 32 to the secondary distribution system 38 and allow the article molds 40 to be moved away from the primary distribution system after they have been filled with molten metal. The baffle 116 is supported by the primary distribution system 32 and blocks the radiation of heat through the open central portion of the annular array of article molds 40 as they are withdrawn from the furnace 78.

In order to support the primary distribution system 32 and baffle 116 in the furnace during withdrawal of the annular array of article molds from the furnace, the primary distribution system 32 is connected with an upper wall 96 of the furnace. During pouring of molten metal into the pour cup 90 in the primary distribution system 32, reaction forces are transmitted from the pour cup to a chill plate 34 through a support post 36. During withdrawal of the article molds 40 from the furnace 78, the post 36 supports the baffle 34 plate in the central portion of the array of article molds.

Having described specific preferred embodiments of the invention, the following is claimed:

1. A mold for use in casting a plurality of articles, said mold comprising a plurality of article molds disposed in an array having an open central portion, each of said article molds having an article mold cavity with a configuration corresponding to the configuration of one of the articles, molten metal distribution means for conducting molten metal to each of said article mold cavities, said molten metal distribution means including a primary distribution system separate from said article molds and having a plurality of passages for conducting molten metal, a plurality of separable joint means connected in fluid communication with said article mold cavities and with said passages in said primary distribution system for conducting a flow of molten metal from said primary distribution system at a plurality of locations and for enabling relative movement to occur between said array of article molds and said primary distribution system after said article mold cavities have been filled with molten metal, baffle plate means disposed in the central portion of the array of article molds for retarding heat transmission from said article molds, and support means disposed in the central portion of the array of article molds and extending between said baffle plate means and said primary distribution system for supporting said baffle plate means from said primary distribution system and for holding said baffle plate means against movement relative to said primary distribution system during relative movement between the array of article molds and said primary distribution system.

2. A mold as set forth in claim 1 wherein said molten metal distribution means includes a secondary distribution system connected to said article molds for move-

ment therewith relative to said primary distribution system, said secondary distribution system including a distribution channel extending around an upper end portion of the array of article molds, said distribution channel having a plurality of openings connected in fluid communication with said article mold cavities, said distribution channel being outwardly of and extending around said support means during at least a portion of the relative movement between the array of article molds and said primary distribution system.

3. A mold as set forth in claim 2 wherein said joint means connects said primary distribution system in fluid communication with said secondary distribution system at a plurality of locations along said distribution channel.

4. A mold as set forth in claim 1 wherein said baffle plate means has a generally circular configuration, said support means extending axially upwardly from said baffle plate means to said primary distribution system to support said baffle plate means independently of supports extending radially from said baffle plate means through the array of article molds.

5. A mold as set forth in claim 1 wherein said primary distribution system includes a pour cup and a plurality of runners extending outwardly from said pour cup toward upper end portions of said article molds, said support means including a support member having a lower end portion connected to said baffle plate means and an upper end portion connected to said pour cup, said support member being at least partially surrounded by the array of article molds.

6. A mold as set forth in claim 1 wherein said primary distribution system, baffle plate means and support means are formed as one piece of ceramic material.

7. A mold as set forth in claim 1 wherein said article molds are disposed in a circular array, said mold further including an annular base interconnecting lower end portions of said article molds and circumscribing said baffle plate means, said annular base having bottom surface means for engaging a chill plate, said baffle plate means being disposed in a central opening in said annular base to block exposure of said surface areas of said article molds to the chill plate prior to relative movement between the array of article molds and said primary distribution system, said baffle plate means being spaced from the central opening in said annular base to expose lower surface areas of said article molds to the chill plate after relative movement between the array of article molds and said primary distribution system.

8. A mold as set forth in claim 1 wherein said molten metal distribution means further includes a secondary distribution system connected to upper end portions of each of said article molds and connected in fluid communication with said primary distribution system by said joint means, said secondary distribution system including a hollow annular distribution ring which is connected in fluid communication with each of said article mold cavities, said annular distribution ring having an axial extent which is substantially greater than its radial extent to facilitate the transfer of heat to said distribution ring.

9. A mold as set forth in claim 1 further including surface means disposed between said article molds to eliminate open space between adjacent article molds and thereby retard the transfer of heat at locations between adjacent article molds.

10. A method of casting a plurality of articles, said method comprising the steps of providing a plurality of

article molds disposed in an array having an open central portion, providing a primary distribution system which is separate from the article molds, conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to cavities in the article molds to fill the cavities in the article molds with molten metal, separating the article molds and primary distribution system by providing relative movement between the article molds and primary distribution system, retarding the transmission of heat from the article molds with a baffle plate disposed in the central portion of the array of article molds, and supporting the baffle plate from the primary distribution system during the relative movement between the article molds and primary distribution system.

11. A method as set forth in claim 10 further including the step of providing a secondary distribution system which defines an annular chamber connected in fluid communication with each of the cavities in the article molds, said step of conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to cavities in the article molds including conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to the annular chamber in the secondary distribution system, said step of separating the article molds and the primary and secondary distribution systems by providing relative movement between them.

12. A method as set forth in claim 10 wherein said step of conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to the cavities in the article molds includes filling the primary distribution system with molten metal and emptying the primary distribution system of molten metal before providing relative movement between the article molds and primary distribution system.

13. A method as set forth in claim 10 wherein the step of supporting the baffle plate from the primary distribution system includes transmitting force from the baffle plate to the primary distribution system along a path through the central portion of the array of article molds.

14. A method as set forth in claim 10 further including the steps of providing a furnace housing, providing a chill plate, supporting the article molds on the chill plate, providing relative movement between the furnace housing and chill plate to position the article molds in the furnace housing, connecting the primary distribution system with the furnace housing, thereafter, performing said step of conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to cavities in the article molds, said step of separating the article molds and primary distribution system including separating the furnace housing and chill plate while supporting the primary distribution system from the furnace housing and supporting the article molds on the chill plate.

15. A ceramic mold for use in casting a plurality of articles, said mold comprising a plurality of article molds disposed in an annular array having an open central portion, each of said article molds having an article mold cavity with a configuration corresponding to the configuration of one of the articles, molten metal distribution means for conducting molten metal to each of said article mold cavities, said molten metal distribution means including a primary distribution system separate from said article molds and a secondary distribution system connected to said article molds, said primary distribution system including a pour cup disposed in a

coaxial relationship with the circular array of article molds and a plurality of runners extending outwardly from said pour cup, said secondary distribution system including an annular distribution ring separate from said runners and disposed at a first axial end portion of and coaxial with the annular array of article molds, said annular distribution ring being formed as one piece with said article molds and having an annular cavity connected in fluid communication with said article mold cavities, joint means connecting said runners and said distribution ring in fluid communication for conducting a flow of molten metal from said primary distribution system to said secondary distribution system and for enabling said secondary distribution system and array of article molds to be moved away from said primary distribution system after said article molds have been filled with molten metal.

16. A ceramic mold as set forth in claim 15 further including an annular ceramic base disposed at a second axial end portion of and coaxial with the annular array of article molds, said annular base being formed as one piece with said article molds and having annular bottom surface means for engaging a chill plate, said article mold cavities being disposed between said annular base and said annular distribution ring.

17. A ceramic mold as set forth in claim 15 further including a baffle plate disposed adjacent to the second axial end portion of and coaxial with the annular array of article molds, and a support member interconnecting said baffle plate and said pour cup to hold said baffle plate against movement relative to said pour cup during movement of said article molds away from said primary distribution system.

18. A ceramic mold as set forth in claim 15 further including a surface means interconnecting said article molds to form a solid annular wall having an inside diameter equal to or less than the inside diameter of said annular distribution ring and an outside diameter equal to or greater than the outside diameter of said annular distribution ring.

19. An apparatus for use in casting a plurality of articles, said apparatus comprising furnace means for supplying heat to a mold receiving chamber in said furnace means, a plurality of article molds at least partially disposed in said mold receiving chamber, each of said article molds having a mold cavity with a configuration corresponding to the configuration of one of the articles, molten metal distribution means for conducting molten metal to each of the article mold cavities, said molten metal distribution means including a primary distribution system at least partially disposed in said mold receiving chamber and separate from said article molds, said primary distribution system including a pour cup for receiving molten metal and a plurality of passages for conducting molten metal away from said pour cup, connector means for connecting said primary distribution system with said furnace means, a plurality of separable joint means connected in fluid communication with said article mold cavities and with said passages in said primary distribution system for conducting a flow of molten metal from said primary distribution system at a plurality of locations and for enabling relative movement to occur between said article molds and said primary distribution system, and means for providing relative movement between said article molds and said furnace means while said connector means holds said primary distribution system against movement relative to said furnace means to separate said article molds

from said mold receiving chamber while at least a portion of said primary distribution system remains in said mold receiving chamber.

20. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 further including support means supporting said plurality of article molds while said article molds are in the mold receiving chamber in said furnace means, and post means separate from said article molds and extending from said pour cup for transmitting forces induced by the pouring of molten metal into said pour cup to said support means.

21. An apparatus as set forth in claim 20 further including baffle means connected with an end portion of said post means opposite from said pour cup for retarding heat transmission from said mold receiving chamber in said furnace means during separation of said article molds from said mold receiving chamber.

22. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 wherein said pour cup includes a base portion and an extension portion extending upwardly from said base portion, said connector means being disposed in engagement with said extension portion of said pour cup to connect said primary distribution system with said furnace means.

23. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 wherein said furnace means includes means for defining an opening, said pour cup extending through said opening so that an upper end portion of said pour cup is disposed outside of the mold receiving chamber in said furnace means, said connector means being disposed in engagement with said upper end portion of said pour cup.

24. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 wherein said article molds are disposed in a circular array having an open central portion, said apparatus further including baffle means disposed in the central portion of the array of article molds for retarding heat transmission from said mold receiving chamber in said furnace means.

25. An apparatus as set forth in claim 24 further including means for connecting said baffle means with said furnace means to hold said baffle means against movement relative to said furnace means during separation of said article molds from the chamber in said furnace means.

26. An apparatus as set forth in claim 25 wherein said baffle means includes a surface which faces toward said upper wall of said furnace means and has a greater reflectivity than the surfaces of said article molds.

27. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 wherein said molten metal distribution means includes a secondary distribution system connected to said article molds, said secondary distribution system including a distribution channel having a plurality of openings connected in fluid communication with said article mold cavities, said joint means connecting said primary distribution system in fluid communication with said secondary distribution system at a plurality of locations along said distribution channel.

28. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 wherein said primary distribution system is formed of a material which is capable of being repeatedly used to conduct molten metal.

29. An apparatus as set forth in claim 19 wherein said article molds are disposed in an annular array having an open central portion, said pour cup being disposed adjacent to a first axial end portion of the annular array of article molds and being disposed in a coaxial relationship with the annular array of article molds, said apparatus further including a ceramic baffle plate disposed adjacent to the second axial end portion of and coaxial

with the annular array of article molds, and means interconnecting said baffle plate and said primary distribution system to hold said baffle plate against movement relative to said primary distribution system.

30. An apparatus as set forth in claim 29 wherein said means interconnecting said baffle plate and said primary distribution system transmits forces from said primary distribution system to said baffle plate during a pouring of molten metal into said pour cup, said baffle plate includes surface means for transmitting forces from said baffle plate to said means for providing relative movement between said article molds and said furnace means.

31. An apparatus as set forth in claim 30 wherein said means interconnecting said baffle plate and said primary distribution system includes a single support post extending between said baffle plate and said pour cup.

32. A method of casting a plurality of articles, said method comprising the steps of providing a mold having a plurality of article molds disposed in an array having an open central portion, a primary distribution system connected in fluid communication with cavities in the article molds and a baffle disposed in the central portion of the array of article molds, moving the mold into a chamber in a furnace, connecting the primary distribution system with the furnace, connecting the baffle with the furnace, thereafter, pouring molten metal into the primary distribution system, conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to the cavities in the article molds, thereafter, moving the article molds at least part way out of the chamber in the furnace while maintaining the primary distribution system and baffle stationary in the chamber in the furnace, and retarding the radiation of heat from the chamber in the furnace with the baffle during performance of said step of moving the article molds out of the chamber in the furnace.

33. A method as set forth in claim 32 wherein said steps of connecting the primary distribution system and baffle with the furnace includes connecting the primary distribution system to the furnace and supporting the baffle from the primary distribution system.

34. A method as set forth in claim 32 wherein the primary distribution system includes a pour cup and a plurality of passages for conducting molten metal from the pour cup, said step of connecting the primary distribution system with the furnace includes moving an end portion of the pour cup through an opening in a wall of the furnace and engaging the end portion of the pour cup to hold the pour cup against movement relative to the wall of the furnace.

35. A method as set forth in claim 34 wherein said step of connecting the baffle with the furnace includes supporting the baffle from the pour cup after having performed said step of connecting the pour cup with the furnace.

36. A method as set forth in claim 32 wherein said step of moving the article molds out of the chamber in the furnace includes separating the article molds from the primary distribution system.

37. A method as set forth in claim 32 further including the steps of moving the article molds back into the furnace, disconnecting the baffle and primary distribution system from the furnace, and moving the article molds, baffle and primary distribution system together out of the chamber in the furnace.

38. A method as set forth in claim 32 further including the steps of supporting the article molds on a support member during the performance of said step of

pouring of molten metal into the primary distribution system, transmitting forces induced by the pouring molten metal into the primary distribution system to the baffle, and transmitting pouring induced forces from the baffle to the support member.

39. A method as set forth in claim 32 wherein the step of providing a mold includes providing a secondary distribution system fixedly connected with said article molds, said step of conducting a flow of molten metal to the cavities in the article molds including conducting a flow of molten metal from the primary distribution system to the secondary distribution system and conducting a flow of molten metal from the secondary distribution system to the article mold cavities, said step of moving the article molds out of the chamber in the furnace including lowering the article molds to a level at which the secondary distribution system is lower than the baffle.

40. A method comprising the steps of providing a furnace having a mold receiving chamber, mounting in the furnace chamber a primary distribution system which includes a pour cup and a plurality of passages extending outwardly from the pour cup, providing a plurality of mold structures each of which includes a plurality of article molds and a secondary distribution system which includes a distribution channel connected in fluid communication with article mold cavities in the article molds, moving a first one of the plurality of mold structures into the furnace chamber with the secondary distribution system of the first mold structure disposed adjacent to the primary distribution system, pouring molten metal into the pour cup of the primary distribution system, conducting a plurality of streams of molten metal from the pour cup through the passages in the primary distribution system to the channel in the secondary distribution system of the first mold structure, conducting molten metal from the distribution channel in the secondary distribution system of the first mold structure to the article mold cavities in the article molds of the first mold structure, emptying the passages in the primary distribution system of molten metal, thereafter, moving the first mold structure out of the furnace chamber, moving a second one of the plurality of mold structures into the furnace chamber with the secondary distribution system of the second mold structure adjacent to the primary distribution system, again pouring molten metal into the pour cup of the primary distribution system, conducting a plurality of streams of molten metal from the pour cup through the passages in the primary distribution system to the channel in the secondary distribution system of the second mold structure to the article mold cavities in the article molds of the second mold structure, emptying the passages in the primary distribution system of molten metal, and, thereafter, moving the second mold structure out of the furnace.

41. A method as set forth in claim 40 further including the step of providing a baffle plate which is fixedly connected with the primary distribution system, said step of moving a first one of the mold structures into the furnace chamber including moving the secondary distribution system and article mold cavities of the first one of the mold structures upwardly past the baffle plate, said step of moving the first one of the mold structures out of the furnace chamber including moving the article mold cavities and secondary distribution system of the second one of the mold structures downwardly past the baffle plate, said step of moving a second one of the

mold structures into the furnace chamber including moving the secondary distribution system and article mold cavities of the second one of the mold structures upwardly past the baffle plate, said step of moving the second one of the mold structures out of the furnace chamber including moving the article mold cavities and secondary distribution system of the second one of the mold structures downwardly past the baffle plate.

42. A method as set forth in claim 41 wherein said step of moving a first one of the plurality of mold structures into the furnace chamber includes placing the first one of the mold structures on a support member disposed outside of the furnace chamber and moving the support member and first mold structure toward the furnace chamber, said step of moving a second one of the mold structures into the furnace chamber includes placing the second one of the mold structures on the support member outside of the furnace chamber and moving the support member and the second mold structure toward the furnace chamber, said method further including the steps of transmitting forces induced by the pouring of molten metal into the pour cup with the first mold structure in the furnace chamber and transmitting forces induced by the pouring of molten metal into the pour cup with the second mold structure in the furnace chamber through the baffle plate to the support member.

43. An apparatus for use in casting a plurality of articles, said apparatus comprising furnace means for supplying heat to a mold receiving chamber in said furnace means, a support member movable toward and away from said furnace means, a plurality of article molds disposed on said movable support member in an annular array, each of said article molds having a cavity with a configuration corresponding to the configuration of one of the articles, drive means for moving said support member toward said furnace means to move said article molds into the chamber in said furnace means and for moving said support member away from said furnace means to withdraw said article molds from the chamber in said furnace means, a primary distribution system for receiving molten metal and directing the molten metal toward article molds, said primary distribution system being disposed adjacent to a first axial end portion of the annular array of article molds when said article molds are in the chamber in said furnace means, baffle means disposed adjacent to a second axial end portion of the annular array of article molds when said article molds are in the chamber in said furnace means for retarding heat transmission from the chamber in said furnace means during withdrawal of said article molds from the chamber in said furnace means, said baffle means having a lower side surface area disposed in abutting engagement with said support member when said article molds are in the chamber in said furnace means, and means extending between said baffle means and said primary distribution system for transmitting forces from said primary distribution system to said baffle means to press the lower side surface area on said baffle means against said support member to at least partially support said primary distribution system during the receiving of molten metal in said primary distribution system and for supporting said baffle means in a stationary relationship with respect to said furnace means during operation of said drive means to withdraw said article molds from said chamber in said furnace means.

44. An apparatus as set forth in claim 43 further including connector means for connecting said primary

distribution system with said furnace means to prevent withdrawal of said primary distribution system from the chamber in said furnace means during withdrawal of said article molds from the chamber in said furnace means.

45. An apparatus as set forth in claim 43 further including a secondary distribution system connected to said article molds and movable therewith during movement of said support member toward and away from said furnace means, said secondary distribution system being connected in fluid communication with each of the article mold cavities, and a plurality of joint means connected in fluid communication with said primary and secondary distribution systems for conducting a flow of metal therebetween at a plurality of locations and for enabling relative movement to occur between said primary and secondary distribution systems.

46. An apparatus as set forth in claim 43 wherein said means extending between said baffle means and said primary distribution system includes a post having an upper end portion connected to said primary distribution system and a lower end portion connected to said baffle means.

47. An apparatus as set forth in claim 43 wherein said primary distribution system, baffle means, and post are formed as one piece of ceramic material.

48. An apparatus as set forth in claim 43 further including an annular base disposed in engagement with said support member and interconnecting lower end portions of said article molds, said annular base circumscribing said baffle means when said article molds are in the chamber in said furnace means.

49. An apparatus as set forth in claim 43 wherein said primary distribution system includes a pour cup having a base portion and an extension portion extending upwardly from said base portion, said apparatus further including connector means disposed in engagement with said extension portion of said pour cup to connect said primary distribution system with said furnace means.

50. A mold for use in casting a plurality of articles, said mold comprising a plurality of article molds disposed in an annular array having an open central portion, each of said article molds having an article mold cavity with a configuration corresponding to the configuration of one of the articles, molten metal distribution means for conducting molten metal to each of said article mold cavities, said molten metal distribution means including a primary distribution system separate from said article molds and a secondary distribution system connected to said article molds, said primary distribution system including a pour cup disposed in a coaxial relationship with the circular array of article molds and a plurality of runners extending outwardly from the pour cup, said secondary distribution system including an annular distribution ring separate from said runners and disposed at a first axial end portion of and coaxial with the annular array of article molds, said annular distribution ring being formed as one piece with said article molds and having an annular cavity connected in fluid communication with said article mold cavities, joint means connecting said runners and said distribution ring in fluid communication for conducting a flow of molten metal from said primary distribution system to said secondary distribution system and for enabling said secondary distribution system and array of article molds to be moved away from said primary distribution system after said article mold cavities have

been filled with molten metal, and baffle plate means disposed at a second axial end portion of and coaxial with the annular array of article molds for retarding heat transmission from said article molds, said baffle plate means being separate from said article molds to enable said article molds to be moved relative to said baffle plate means.

51. A mold as set forth in claim 50 further including support means disposed in the central portion of the array of article molds and extending between said baffle plate means and said primary distribution system for supporting said baffle plate means.

52. An apparatus as set forth in claim 50 further including surface means interconnecting said article molds to form a solid annular wall.

53. A mold as set forth in claim 50 further including an annular base plate disposed at the second axial end portion of and coaxial with the array of article molds, said annular base plate being formed as one piece with said article molds.

54. An apparatus as set forth in claim 50 wherein said pour cup includes a base section and an extension section which is formed separately from said base section and connected to said base section.

55. In an apparatus for casting metal forms, said apparatus being adapted to establish controlled heating zones, the combination comprising:

an induction heating source;

a mold assembly in the form of an annular array of individual molds, adapted to receive heat energy on the outer and inner surfaces of said array and adapted to move in a predetermined direction;

a liquid metal distribution means adapted to separably and matingly engage said mold assembly into which said liquid metal is poured, said distribution means retarding the entry of radiant energy to the interior of the annular array of molds when said distribution means is in metal pouring communication with said mold assembly;

a first heating zone defined by said induction heat source with said mold assembly and distribution means disposed therein;

a second zone in which the temperature is less than in said first zone;

baffle means fixedly secured to said distribution means forming a separation between said first and second zones to restrict the flow of radiant energy emanating from said first zone from entering said second zone;

means for moving said mold assembly from said first zone to said second zone;

means for retaining said distribution means stationary in said first zone during movement of said mold assembly to effect the separation of said mold assembly from said distribution means when said mold assembly begins its movement toward said second zone to expose the inner surface of said mold assembly to the radiant energy while in said first zone to maintain the metal in its liquid state, said mold assembly being rapidly cooled in said second zone;

whereby said combination produces a high temperature gradient for each unit of length along at least a portion of said mold assembly.

56. An apparatus as set forth in claim 55 wherein said baffle means is disposed in a central portion of said annular array of molds during movement of said mold assembly from said first zone to said second zone.

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57. An apparatus as set forth in claim 55 wherein said baffle means is connected with said distribution means by a post disposed in a coaxial relationship with said distribution means.

58. An apparatus as set forth in claim 55 wherein said means for retaining said distribution means stationary

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includes means for connecting said distribution means with said induction heating source.

59. An apparatus as set forth in claim 55 wherein said baffle means cooperates with said mold assembly and induction heating means to establish and maintain essentially horizontal isotherms in said first and second zones adjacent to said baffle means during movement of said mold assembly from said first zone to said second zone.

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